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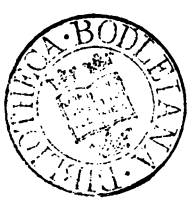
WITHIN AN ACE.

By MRS. C. JENKIN,

AUTHOR OF "TWO FRENCH MARRIAGES," "COUSIN STELLA,"
"ONCE AND AGAIN," ETC. ETC.



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WITHIN AN ACE.

CHAPTER I.

HERO, OR NO HERO?

"'Lo! the conq'ring hero comes!'" rolled out a sonorous bass voice.

There followed on this announcement a rustle as of wings, and a group of girls ran from all parts of the room to cluster round the speaker. One leant on his shoulder, trying to peep into the letter he held aloft, another hung on his arm, pulling it down in the hope to satisfy her curiosity; a third knelt before him, unconsciously taking the attitude of Thetis petitioning Jove. May, his pretty May, the most backward to come, he seized with his strong

right hand, drawing her down on his knee. It was a pleasant picture of home.

Imagine a father in the very noon of manhood, tall, stalwart, a large head still clothed with crisp chestnut curls, though the ample forehead is higher and broader than it had been some ten years previous: clear hazel eyes, a well-shaped nose, a mouth beautiful in form and expression. Goodness was written on this man's face in distinct characters. His three daughters resembled him; but the second, the one on his knee, was his softened perfected image.

The girl leaning on Mr. Sinclair's shoulder was his adopted child. Catherine Leighton, always called Cattie, was the one anxiety of the family. Beauty absolute, such as May's, she did not possess, but a something more—grace. Is she brunette or blonde? Her eyes, are they blue or black? Is she grave or gay? Those who had known her longest could scarcely answer any of these queries. Is she clever? That dark woman writing at a distant table, would assure you that Cattie could do anything she pleased. That red-haired old man reading Shakspeare, and who had not deigned to lift his eyes on his brother's announce-

ment, would have growled out that "she would never do anything worth doing."

Uncle Dan, indeed, has always a sarcasm ready for Cattie. By the by, he never calls her Cattie, but invariably Miss Leighton. He scorns her music, her drawing, her dancing, propounds to the girls little ticklish problems in the expectation of confounding and mortifying Cattie and procuring a triumph for his darling May, whom he believes to be a genius. But Cattie always divines the answer, while sweet May is knitting her lovely brows in vain perplexity. Uncle Dan is openly hostile to Cattie; he will not allow her any share of personal attraction. He predicts that she will end on the stage, that abomination of desolation to a rigid Scotch Presbyterian. He is never even touched when some demonstration of his ill-will has brought tears to her eyes. The truth is, uncle Dan has a clear perception that Cattie is terribly captivating, and he is jealous of her for May's sake.

Miss Toynbee, the dark lady in the yellow turban *à la Staël*, is the governess. She has been with the Sinclairs ever since Mrs. Sinclair's death. For two years after her entrance into the family, she had

been universally suspected of an intention to marry Mr. Sinclair. But he declared on his honour that she had never made him any direct or indirect proposition of the kind, always adding, "The only fault I have to find with her, is her making me listen to her verses. To quiet her, I once printed, at my expense, her tragedy of *Ariadne*, but the dear creature must find some less classical subject if she means to be read."

"Bessie and May and Carry Sinclair are three angels," would Miss Toynbee say, "but with no sacred fire, not a spark to blow into a flame, *terre à terre*, their spirits cling to the earth. Cattie, now, her soul has wings, she will soar into the empyrean, she will leave a track of flame behind her!"

At the sound of Mr. Sinclair's voice, Miss Toynbee's pen had remained in mid air, between the paper and the inkstand.

"What hero, dear Dar?" exclaimed Cattie. "Is it Lord Clyde, or Burton, or ——?"

"No, no," laughed Mr. Sinclair; "restrain your imaginations, young ladies, it is only . . . . but there," putting the coveted letter into Cattie's hand, "read it aloud for the general benefit."

Cattie read as follows :—

"DEAR MR. SINCLAIR,— St. Blaze, July 30.

"I have been doing as I would be done by—helping my neighbour. Since my stay here I have become intimate with a Comtesse de Jençay and her son. They belong to the old noblesse of France. She, indeed, is a type of a class of Frenchwomen almost extinct; she is by birth and family tradition a Royalist,—you understand, an out-and-out Legitimist,—concealing under affable manners the pride of Lucifer. She is besides fiercely Ultramontane, and in spite of a certain leaven of Regency latitudinarian ideas, an upholder of Popes, priests, and all thereunto belonging.

"She and her son differ, I believe, on every point, on religion, politics, I was going to add on morals also; at all events, he is certainly less lax in speech than she is. I confess my sympathies are with the count, although I admit he sometimes carries his opposition too far. She can see no good in modern notions, he none in those of the old régime. She resists the notion of equality, and he upholds it by word and deed. I fancy, but I

am not sure of this, that mother and son have never been on cordial terms since the marriage of Mdlle. de Jençay. However that may be, it is certain that Count Armand wishes to pay England and Scotland a visit. He says that he wants to study our institutions and countryfolk; but as his mother was lamenting to me yesterday that she had found him some delicious 'partis' in English young ladies to marry, I suspect my count's desire to see the British Isles has another motive than to gain information. 'If he would only marry, chere dame,' says the old Comtesse, 'I could leave this place and return to Rome, to the society of my dear agreeable cardinals,—for they *are* agreeable. They are witty, subtle, never worry you with a continual yearning after this and that, they keep to what has been; and at all events they know what they want, which those of my son's school do not.'

"I have given M. de Jençay a letter of introduction to you, my old friend, and, trust me, I would not have done so had I not known him to be an honourable young man."

"Ay, we are all honourable men," growled Uncle Dan.

Cattie went on :—

"The Count is also a polished man of the world, more given, I should say, to 'effleurer les gens' (make Miss Toynbee translate that phrase if she can, for I cannot,) than to form friendships."

"Just so superficial, that's what the jargon means," again interrupted uncle Dan; but this time Cattie did not stop.

"He is certainly not of an expansive nature, listens rather than speaks. I hope I am not impressing you unfavourably towards a person I really like and esteem, as my introducing him to you proves. Perhaps you will be able, through some of your clients, to get him some shooting and deer-stalking; you would confer an obligation on me by so doing. My love to you all. Miss Toynbee will have an opportunity of showing how well an Englishwoman who has never been in France can speak French. M. de Jençay understands English well, he can speak it in French fashion. I beg Cattie will be merciful."

The letter was signed, "ELIZABETH PATTERSON."

"Well, I am disappointed," exclaimed Cattie, as she laid down the letter.

"Papa, why did you say a conquering hero was coming?" asked Tottie.

"I made a blunder, my dear," returned her father, gravely. "We are above caring about French Counts."

"A conquering hero, however, does mean someone who has conquered something, which this Count never has," retorted Cattie.

"His mother seems to have furnished him with opportunities for conquering himself, and I hope he has availed himself of them; but I plead guilty of giving false information, and I beg pardon for myself and the Count. We must do the best we can for him," added Mr. Sinclair.

The writer of the letter was one of the oldest friends of the Sinclair family, and that means a great deal in Scotland; so, though uncle Dan might grumble and the young ladies fume at the prospect of a French visitor, Mrs. Patterson's recommendation would be attended to.

Bessie, as lady of the house, was perplexed as to which spare room she should allot to the Count. In general, bachelors were lodged on the highest floor, but in his character of foreigner and noble,

she doubted whether he ought not to have the best room.

"To be sure," said Mr. Sinclair. "Though he is not a hero, still we have not counts every day to visit us. Eh, May, what do you say?"

"The little green room looking into the garden is the prettiest: and the smell from the mignionette below is perfectly delicious."

"Then the green room let it be; and he won't be a count worth his porridge if he does not appreciate the mignionette."

"Who were the first whistlers, papa?" here called out Tottie. "Do you give it up? The winds, when they whistled 'Over the hills and far away.'"

"Oh! Tottie, be quiet," said Bessie. "Papa, you must please remember to bring some fish from town to-morrow."

"That's my good Bessie," observed uncle Dan. "The idea of a count only suggests fish to her. I should like to know Miss Leighton's thoughts on the same subject."

"Of fish, sir?" said Cattie, demurely.

"Yes, Miss Leighton; of fish for women's nets."

"If you mean the Count by your metaphor, sir, I feel curiosity—that's allowable, I hope. Yes, I should like to see a Frenchman who is neither a master nor a hairdresser. I should be glad to see what a French gentleman is like."

Cattie spoke with a pure English accent, and her voice was a rare one, powerful, yet sweet; but whenever she spoke to uncle Dan there was always a twang of irritation in it.

After an instant's pause, she added, "You have heard Bessie's thoughts and mine; why don't you ask what are May's?"

"Just about our white frocks, dear," said May, answering for herself, with the intonation of her native town, which in her was pretty.

"Don't set to pulling caps for the Count," said Mr. Sinclair.

"Oh! papa," exclaimed Tottie; "as if any of *us* would ever care for a Frenchman!"

"You forget his title, my dear."

"Who cares for French titles?" said Tottie, with a droll toss of her little head. "It's not the same as an English one."

"A clever discovery," put in Miss Toynbee.

"And pray why don't you consider a French title equivalent to an English title?"

"Because it isn't," returned Tottie, indignantly. "No one would ever make me believe it was. I hate Frenchmen, that I do."

"Reasons, reasons!" said her father.

"They are our natural enemies; and I am sure they hate us," answered Tottie.

"The Scotch are like the Jews," said Miss Toynbee. "They believe themselves to be the favoured people of God. They go out to spoil their neighbours while they hold them as an abomination."

"I look on a Cosmopolite and an Atheist as much the same thing," retorted uncle Dan, in a voice like the crackling of thorns.

"Miss Toynbee," called out Tottie, "why should your nose and chin be like you and uncle Dan?"

"They are not, you silly child."

"Yes they are, because words are always passing between them."

"Do, Tottie, be done with those nonsensical riddles. Nobody cares for them," said Bessie.

"Just one more, dear Bessie. What jams had

they in the ark? I'll tell you, dear. Preserved pears. Do you understand?"

"No; and I don't care to do so."

"Pairs, dear," said the irrepressible Tottie.

"Be quiet, Tiggles," whispered Cattie.

Carry had three or four diminutives by which she was known. To call her Tiggles was to silence her.

Mr. Sinclair, as if waking out of a dream, said, "Talking of nets and fish, reminds me of a pretty duet that was popular in my very young days—my mother used to sing it."

"It's in the old blue book," said Bessie.

And May and Cattie were presently joining their fresh young voices in the fishing duet. May had a clear bird-like pipe; but Cattie had a grand mezzo-soprano voice, such as you seldom hear off the stage.

Mr. Sinclair lay back in his chair with closed eyes, beating time on his knee. There was a smile on his lips; but when he opened his eyes, they were brimful of hot unshed tears.

The two girls waited for the usual, "Thank you, my dears—very well sung." As the praise and thanks did not come, May went to his side.

"Asleep again, papa?"

He looked at her, and said, "Your music, children, brought to my recollection some lines of Longfellow;" and he went on, in a low tone, stroking May's hair the while,—

Come back, ye friendships long departed,
That like o'erflowing streamlets started,
And now are dwindled, one by one
To stony channels in the sun!
Come back! ye friends whose lives are ended,
Come back, with all that light attended,
Which seemed to darken and decay
When ye arose and went away.
Alas! our memory may retrace
Each circumstance of time and place,
Season and scene come back again,
And outward things unchanged remain,
The rest we cannot reinstate,
Ourselves we cannot recreate,
Nor set our souls to the same key
Of the remembered harmony.

Before he pronounced the last words, the girls were all again clustered about him; loving eyes looked up to his, loving hands caressed him. They were sorry because they saw he was sad; but as yet they knew sorrow only by name. How could they realize the feelings, sympathise with the regrets of one so removed from them by experiences of many kinds?

Miss Toynbee had stopped her busy pen to listen. For an instant something like a cloud passed over and softened her flashing black eyes; then she said, "No use looking back. Forward—always forward."

"Say rather, 'Higher—always higher,'" returned Mr. Sinclair.

"The same thing, sir, is it not?"

"If the end be Heaven," he replied.

"Of course, sir; but as we are on the earth, I take it for granted we are meant to interest ourselves in this planet of ours."

"By writing poems and cultivating the arts," said uncle Dan.

"All that serves to carry on civilization is a good work, Mr. Daniel."

"Civilization!" repeated uncle Dan. "Ay, that's the modern cry, the excuse for every folly nowadays. War! Oh! an excellent thing. It carries civilization into New Zealand or the Fegee Islands. We murder some twenty thousand innocent creatures, break mothers' hearts—what consequence? Civilization spreads."

"Uncle Dan would prefer paint to broadcloth," said Cattie, in a low voice to May.

Uncle Dan turned on her immediately.

"A young lady like Miss Leighton is of course an authority on the subject."

Cattie grew very red; but she would not allow herself to be so put down. She warmed to the attack.

"I *have* read about civilization, sir; and I know that conquest by a superior race does civilize the inferior."

"Exterminate, Miss Leighton; that's what your reading should have taught you. Pray, how did the conquest of the Spaniards civilize Mexico? How have the red skins fared since the advent into their country of Europeans? The inferior, Miss Leighton, is extinguished, not civilized, by the superior race. Keep to your trillings and quaverings, and your card-box painting. Women are never so agreeable as when they remain in their own sphere."

Miss Toynbee threw aside her pen with a decided movement.

"Why is there to be one sphere for man and one for woman, Mr. Daniel? Scripture calls woman man's helpmate, and not a doll for the amusement of his leisure hours. We have brains as well as you."

Uncle Dan cleared his throat significantly.

"And hands and hearts."

"Sometimes," put in the adversary.

"All we ask for is a fair field and no favour."

"You want all the field and all the favour into the bargain. Yes, yes; force yourselves into man's arena, make yourselves lawyers, doctors, preachers, soldiers, dentists, for what I care; you'll be the sufferers. Just now, men work out of tenderness for their women folk. Take out diplomas, set yourselves up in chambers and offices, and see what'll come of it. Men will care no more about you, except to keep you back in the race."

For years uncle Dan and Miss Toynbee had battled these questions, and the combat had generally been brought to a conclusion, as now, by the intervention of May.

"Let me alone, girl," the old man said. "Kisses are not arguments."

"They stop them," laughed May, as she put her fresh young lips to his.

Bad-tempered people are always declared to be rough diamonds, by their female advocates. If a man is morose, there is sure to be some woman who

excuses him, by accusing his circulation; if he is violent, wounding every one forced into contact with him, well, of course, he has the defects of his virtues —has he not the warmest of hearts? and so on. It is a pleasant illusion, and renders life endurable.

Uncle Dan was a very rough diamond. His whole person revealed that he was irascible. New acquaintances held aloof from him; the timid felt themselves become imbecile under the white heat of his pale grey eye. His very silence revealed an impatience that disturbed people's presence of mind. What amount of will must not this irritable man have exerted to be, what he invariably was, gentle to his brother and nieces, and, on the whole, forbearing to the servants.

One thing remained a puzzle to the outer world, and that was why, being the elder brother by many years, he was always called Mr. Daniel. The habit had arisen from his having chosen to live in Mr. Sinclair's house, and to give up to Archie the headship of the family.

It was Miss Toynbee's privilege to break down uncle Dan's will, to make him renounce his taciturnity. With no other woman had he ever con-

descended to argue. She said of him that he was the most even-tempered of men, he was always cross; and he said of her that, "poor thing, she had a bee in her bonnet."

Cattie was the only inmate of Mayfield for whom he had no patience, and you might sooner have levelled mountains or exalted valleys than have uprooted one of Mr. Daniel Sinclair's prejudices. The girl herself protested that this dislike had had its rise from her having once taken an unread *Times* to cut out a pattern. The misdemeanour had been committed soon after she had come to live with the Sinclairs, six years ago; he had passed sentence on her then as frivolous, vain, and affected, and he had never retracted an iota of the condemnation.

Uncle Dan's ideal woman was her of the Book of Proverbs. She who rises early and watches late, who overlooks her maidens, and who, if she does not spin the linen of the household, sees that it is kept in good order. Of all creatures distasteful to him it was a woman with artistic tastes. Anathema, maranatha.

If uncle Dan was an uncut diamond, Cattie was one with many facettes. Her character was a medley

—an enigma to herself and to every one about her. There was such a mixture of lofty and trivial—of cold and hot—of love and hate—with now and then a bit of romance, that there was no coming to any conclusion about her. Even a small show of kindness would make her adore you to-day—an adoration that the slightest incident might turn to detestation. She would work with forty horse-power one week, the next remain idle and indifferent. "A capricious monkey," said uncle Dan.

There was one person, however, excepted from all the changes of Cattie's humours, and that was Mr. Sinclair. With him she was humble and loving; his will seemed her law.

On the day that she was one-and-twenty, she had asked her guardian to let her have a quiet talk with him. She tried to express to him her intense gratitude for all he had done for her. Cattie had not the gift of ready tears; in moments of great emotion hands and lips hardened to something of the rigidity of granite, but it was impossible for Mr. Sinclair to mistake the reality of the feeling she struggled to put into words. But it was not alone her gratitude she had to confess. There was something else to be

told. Cattie was worse than poor; she was penniless, and Cattie wanted to make herself independent by her own exertions.

"Nonsense, my dear! I should as soon have expected such a declaration from Bessie or May."

"But I am not your real child," replied Cattie, her lips quivering as she said this.

"Is it a good feeling that dictated those words?" he asked.

"I am not good. I don't think I was intended to be good."

"Hush! child."

She seized his hand, held it against her cold lips for an instant.

"But you are an angel! I am grateful to you. Indeed, indeed, I do love you; but hate is stronger than love with me."

"Poor little soul!" ejaculated Mr. Sinclair.

"I cannot be happy here any longer," went on Cattie, hurriedly. "It will only get worse and worse."

"It has been said, and said truly, Cattie, that we may change our skies, but we always carry ourselves about with us. You will never, my poor

child, have less cause for suffering than you have here."

"I don't say I shall be happier, but I shall be better. I am growing wicked, dear Dar (the name she had invented for Mr. Sinclair). I don't think uncle Dan meant to do so much harm, but he has been a spirit of evil to me; he tempts me. No; I must go away."

"Is it possible that an old man's crabbedness, or his partiality for May—for a girl who loves you as a sister—can be the cause of such bitterness."

"Not his love for May, poor darling; but his injustice to me. The pin-pricks he has been giving me for years have made me feel sore all over. Just as you make me good, he rouses all the bad nature in me. I can't help fancying he has an 'evil eye.' If I stay he will bring some misfortune on me."

"But what would you do? What are you fit for?" asked Mr. Sinclair, looking with pity and fear on the attractive, impulsive pleader.

"I mean to be—I wish to be—Mamma said it was the best thing for me——" Cattie hesitated.

"What did your mother wish, my dear?" asked

Mr. Sinclair, believing that Cattie's agitation was caused by the mention of her mother.

"A singer, or—or—an actress."

Mr. Sinclair had expected to hear that she wished to be a governess or a companion. All the Scotchman in him was roused by this declaration. For the first time since Cattie had known him, she saw a look of anger on her benefactor's face. Before he could speak, she was on her knees.

"Don't, don't say anything unkind to me. I can bear it from any one but you. I will obey you—indeed I will—in all things."

"Then, my dear, give up all idea of such a means of gaining your livelihood. The tempting spirit is indeed at your ear, Cattie. He has shown you the world at your feet, but the conditions he exacts, Cattie, are you prepared to agree to them? Would you shut yourself out from what should be a woman's Paradise? Have you never dreamed of a happy home, with a husband and children to love and cherish?"

Cattie, who was now standing before him, shook her head roguishly:

"No, dear Dar, I have *never* dreamed such

dreams. I have never seen a man I thought I could *endure* as a husband. Everybody is so commonplace. Of course, some of the people I see are very clever, and all that; but I had rather die, like the Lady of Shalott, than marry one of them."

"You want plumes, and armour, and jack-boots."

"Anything would be better than the horrid coats in fashion; and such feet!"

"You are a sillier child than I took you for—evidently not fit to guide yourself. However, let us discuss your project a little more. How do you know you have the requisite talent for an actress or a singer? You may have a passion for an art, without any talent for it."

"For two years before poor mamma died, I studied for the stage,—she said it was the only chance for me; and the other day"—here Cattie reddened violently—"Mr. M—— heard me sing, and wrote to say he would engage me."

"Pray, who is Mr. M——?"

"The impresario of Her Majesty's," replied Cattie, opening her eyes with astonishment that the question was necessary.

"And when and where had Mr. M—— an opportunity of hearing you?"

"He was down here a fortnight ago, and I begged old Parodi to ask him to come and hear me sing at his house. Parodi did not wish to do so, but I made him. If there's any fault in the matter, it's entirely mine."

"And Miss Toynbee, did she go with you to this rendezvous?"

"No, I got Mrs. McKenzie to chaperone me."

Mr. Sinclair was confounded by the whole of Cattie's confession. He had been accustomed to say, as all men do, that women were unaccountable creatures; doing wrong with a good intention,—inclined to crooked paths rather than straight ones, even when the end was laudable; but there had been with him, as with others, a mental reservation as regarded his own household. They were for him types of candour and simplicity. It was a trying moment when Cattie shook this conviction. He remained so long silent that Cattie touched his hand to rouse him.

"Did you ever read Mrs. Trimmer's story of the Robins? I advise you to do so, my dear; for you

remind me of that wilful Pecksy who would leave the nest, and fell and broke one of her wings."

"It was Flapsy, not Pecksy, dear Dar," said Cattie; "and as you have told Flapsy to stay in the nest, why, she will; but I shall never be a tame bird, content to sing in a cage. I shall sprout out in some distressing way. I shall be a lecturer on woman's wrongs, or a Primitive Methodist preacher, or a fashionable milliner. It may be shockingly wrong, but I could not bear a jog-trot life, to do to-morrow what I did to-day."

"Nothing more hideously monotonous than the life of an actress, Cattie,—saying, singing, looking the same things night after night."

"Ah! but it is glorious to hold thousands of people silent, panting, interested only in you; to move a thousand hearts as though they were but one."

"Promise not to take in future any such decided step as you have done without consulting me. Take a year for reflection. You are your own mistress, my dear. I ask this as a favour. I have no right to control you."

Cattie suddenly burst into tears.

"There, you see you do not love me as your own child; it is all pity and charity: cruel, cruel."

It was a difficult task to restore her to some calm. She mastered her emotion at length, but not one of all Mr. Sinclair's tender words had power to efface that unguarded phrase, "I have no right to control you," in which his unexpressed annoyance had clothed itself.

"I shall never, never go against your will," she said at last.

"Then you will give up all idea of the stage. Ah, child! child! a sore heart you have given me this night."

From that time forth there was a change in Cattie's habits. She, who had been a bookworm, now scarcely ever opened a volume. She neglected her music with the same determination, irritating her tastes by contradiction. She who had always tried to avoid a walk was now the first one to propose some excursion: she even took to gardening.

"I don't understand you, Cattie," said Miss Toynbee, as she stood by, watching her digging and planting.

"I am burying my first passion," was the reply.

"Good heavens! girl."

"Mr. Sinclair has refused his consent, so there's no more to be said."

Miss Toynbee looked so puzzled that Cattie laughed and said:—

"You are dying to know who l'objet aimé can be. It is neither Mr. Robertson, nor Davie McLean, nor Andrew Logan, nor any of the six Brodies; in fact, dear T., I never saw the beloved but in dreams."

"Ah! I understand. I hope you never talk in this way to anybody else, otherwise you might really be supposed to have an unfortunate attachment."

"It would be no supposition."

"Don't be obstinate and absurd, Cattie," said the governess.

But Cattie was both very often.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOUR AND THE MAN.

MR. SINCLAIR had brought fish from town for eight consecutive days; the ninth he neglected to do so, and of course that was the very day Monsieur le Comte Armand de Jençay made his appearance at Mayfield.

Miss Toynbee and the four girls were all in the drawing-room, ready dressed for dinner, but not as they would have been had they expected the French stranger.

Tottie described the scene of his arrival in her diary, thus:—

"My lord fell like a bomb among us. Miss Toynbee was so horridly put out because she had on her No. 3 turban—the frightfullest of the three—that she forgot all her French. Bessie muttered, 'No fish.' May blushed, and was perfectly angelic.

The darling Cattie first looked savage and ugly, then smiled, which makes her pretty enough. My frock was torn, so I hid behind la Toynbee, and my lord didn't see me; indeed, he took no notice of me after papa had obliged him to see me, by introducing me, as he always does, as the last but not the least, of his family.

"My lord isn't handsome, but he isn't bad-looking, considering he is a Frenchman. His hands are so brown, I thought he was eating his dinner in brown gloves."

Tottie was an unconscious plagiarist in making this last observation. The fact suggested the comparison quite naturally.

It is next to impossible that any individual should produce the same impression on a group of persons. The three elder girls gathered together in Miss Sinclair's room before going to bed, to talk over the visitor.

"Well, what do you think of him?" asked Cattie, the initiator on all such occasions.

"He is plain, but gentlemanly," said Bessie, "different from what I expected. He does not smell of cigars, and he is not impudent."

"He is very polite and good-natured," said May. "I liked his manner to papa and T——. I don't think him ugly."

"His eyes are not bad; his nose may pass; his mouth isn't stupid; and his boots, they are delicious!" said Cattie.

"I expected him to eat with his knife," said Bessie, "but the only peculiarity I remarked was the quantity of bread he took."

"Half-a-dozen pieces at once, like old Mother McCallum with the macaroons. I wonder what he thinks of us?"—this was from Cattie.

"Nothing at all, probably: we must seem mere dowdies to a man accustomed to the beauties of Paris."

"It's exactly the contrast that will make him observe us," replied Cattie. "I caught him inspecting T——'s turban."

"You observed him pretty closely, it seems," retorted Bessie, bridling.

"Yes, I did, dear old propriety,—just as I should some newly-imported animal in the Zoological Gardens. In general, I can read off people at first sight."

"Say that you think you can," interrupted Bessie.

"But he puzzles me," went on Cattie. "He is like an exercise in a foreign tongue, and I want a key to help me to construe it."

"I don't see any necessity for your understanding M. de Jençay," said Bessie, wrathfully.

"Necessity!" repeated Cattie, "no, but I, for one, always prefer to learn that for which there is no necessity."

"Don't talk any more about him, at all events."

"Do you not know I am a woman? When I think I must speak."

"Such stuff!" said Bessie.

"It's Shakspeare's, not mine, old lady."

Here Tottie made her appearance, half undressed.

"I can hear all you are saying, and I have just come to tell you that I could understand my lord's eyes, though Cattie couldn't. They said as plain as plain could be, that he thought May divine."

"Nonsensical child," laughed May.

Who has not had to wonder over those unthought-of accidents which bring people from the four corners of the earth to work out the problems of each other's lives?

If Cattie,—as she and May went along the passage their arms intertwined,—if Cattie had spoken she would have uttered two words, and they would have been "I wonder." She had, so to speak, a sensation as of expectation, akin to that we feel when, for the first time, we wait the rising of the curtain at a theatre. The unknown tickled the imagination, of which she had no lack.

May spoke; and she said: "Oh, Cattie, how shall I manage to speak French?"

"Never mind making mistakes; when people come to England they must expect to hear English spoken."

"But one would wish to be kind to a stranger."

"The kindest thing you can do in this case, is to give English lessons. Gute nacht, meine liebste;" and Cattie closed her door.

The prettiest sight imaginable met the Frenchman's eyes next morning when he looked out of the green room window. At the further end of the lawn two girls were down on their knees filling a root basket with flowers. He watched them, speculating on the difference of character to be implied from their gestures. The taller clearly was the one who

governed; he could perceive that she it was who decided all points. Both charming; the shorter, the one who did as she was bid, decidedly enlisted his manly sympathies in her favour. Will any man deny that the admiration he is forced to give to her who can do, is not more than counterbalanced by the tenderness he willingly accords to her who humbly pleads her inability? Is it not true that talent in women is oftener repulsive than attractive? Female talent has to earn its pardon by vieing with the violet.

Every body loved May Sinclair; she had no pretensions to cleverness of any kind, but with her patience and gentleness and readiness to serve, carried about with her an atmosphere of pleasantness. She was a direct contrast to Cattie, who, with her brightness, her vivacity, her eager questioning spirit, troubled you. She had heard herself called "a painful girl." Uncle Dan's favourite epithet for her was, "a rocket"—fire and fury ending in smoke.

Not one of those who criticized her ever thought of making the observation, that she must have some nobleness of spirit to know that a constant com-

parison to her disadvantage was made, and yet that she never pained nor depreciated May by word or deed; nevertheless, this general disapprobation had had its effect, and Cattie was somewhat reckless. She had come to say, "Since no one believes I have any good in me, I shall at least prove I am clever." This state of feeling fostered a craving for publicity, the seed of which had long ago been sown; a craving which more or less attends all talent. "I would rather be Grisi or Patti, than Queen of England," said Cattie, and she meant it.

To return to the Frenchman. He continued his watch, amused to see how easily the girls were startled; the flight of a bird, the fall of a leaf, and they were on their feet; and after every alert the tinkle of their low laughter fell on his ear most musically.

"This Scotch lawyer has nothing to envy the noblest of us all," thought the Count.

Tottie now came rushing across the lawn with an armful of puppies, which the next instant were rolling like so many black and white balls on the grass. De Jençay guessed from a certain pantomime that the elder were remonstrating with the younger

on the disarray of her dress, which undoubtedly left much to be desired; he was sure they alluded to the possibility of his seeing her, for Tottie turned and looked straight at his windows, then shaking her head with a motion as wild as that of a colt, gathered up her puppies and pranced off again.

The Count's further observations were brought to an end by his valet bringing in hot water, and an account of the arrangements below stairs. To hear M. Cour, you might have supposed he and his master were visiting some other planet; every thing he saw and heard was judged through distorting spectacles. It was from Cour that M. de Jençay learned the ages of the young ladies, and that the tall Mees was not even a relation of the family.

How had Cour managed to gather this information? Miss Toynbee, to be sure, had said the lady's maid possessed a little French, having been abroad some fifteen years since. But Beatson's French went no further than, "Commang vous portez vous?" with the supplement of "heizzes wasser," which was good Scotch to the valet.

The loud ringing of a bell, evidently a summons of some kind, was followed by the appearance of

Mr. Sinclair himself at de Jençay's door. The host came to inquire if the guest would like to join in the family worship, which had been omitted the evening before from the desire not to take any one of a different persuasion by surprise. De Jençay expressed his readiness to conform to all the customs of the house. He said, "I have inherited my form of belief as I have my name, but I have a great respect for Protestantism. Some of the most admirable women I have known have been Protestants."

Mr. Sinclair, not considering the staircase a suitable place for religious discussion, led the way in silence to the dining-room. The ladies were seated at the upper end, each with a book in her hand. At some distance sat uncle Dan, alone. Mr. Sinclair gave the Count a chair by Tottie, and then took his own place at a small table, on which lay an open Bible. As soon as he was seated, the servants came in, headed by the grey-haired Effie,—the nurse who had seen all the girls born. The younger maids sat on a red-covered form; Effie had an armchair, and so had her contemporary, old Tom the groom. Tottie presented her neighbour with a

French Bible, pointing out the chapter her father was about to read. Whiffs of odorous air came through the open windows; the fine voice of the father, the reverent aspect of the family group, made up a scene such as de Jençay had never before witnessed. It touched him as no pompous ceremony had ever done. It was altogether strange and singularly pleasant.

The prayers over, the ladies gave their guest their morning greeting, Bessie hoping he had slept well. At breakfast,—a real Scotch breakfast, which explained to de Jençay why Scotland was called the land of cakes,—he could better judge of the appearance of the family party, into which Fate, under the shape of Mrs. Patterson, had plunged him.

Tottie's announcement of the night before had been premature. De Jençay had not been struck with admiration for May, or any of the young ladies. He had not come thither to seek a wife, and only with such an idea would girls have interested him. In fact, it was a principle with him, as with most *comme il faut* Frenchmen, never to pay any attention to the unmarried, unless with a decided view to matrimony. But he was beginning to feel the

influence of his surroundings—what Taine calls, "*l'influence du milieu.*" Everything pleased his taste; the very cheerfulness of the young and lovely girls was subdued.

Bessie inspired him indeed with the respect he would have thought due to her mother. She was so calm, so polite, she spoke so steadily to the point, that she awed him, as she did every other man. Not one of the single men who habitually visited at Mayfield, ever thought of Miss Sinclair and love together. All the old married men, however, swore by Bessie. In taking upon her the position of lady of the house, she had adopted a manner thoroughly fitted to the part. She had even exaggerated the requisite propriety; her reception bow, her measured voice, the severity of her eye, kept wooers aloof, and yet in the secret of her heart, Bessie would have wished to be sought and won; but not for the best man in broad Scotland would she have given a favouring glance until the cabalistic words had been spoken.

The Count's attention was divided between May and Cattie. The first, with her brown pensive eyes, her singularly clear complexion, realized his precon-

ception of a fair English girl. She was not shy, for she met his glance unshrinkingly as a child might have done. May was reserved, not shy.

The tall, pale girl, with the long bright curls, was she pretty, or not? No—yes—and then no, and yes, again. The face had its defects—the deep set blue eyes were not large; but the lashes were long and dark—the eyebrows, too, were marked—the nose and mouth were not in any way remarkable, but the smile was of all beauty—when Cattie smiled she became beautiful. If the features were defective, the figure was faultless, and then Cattie was graceful, and is not grace even more attractive than beauty. Tottie described Cattie perfectly, in saying that she was lovely, and ugly, ten times in a day. Miss Tottie herself promised to be the handsomest of the sisters, but just now her face seemed all eyes.

The conversation was carried on in a hotch-potch of English and French. Mr. Sinclair had an almost irreproachable accent, but made sad work with the genders. Bessie spoke correctly, but with decided Scotch intonations; May spoke not at all; Cattie with facility but incorrectly. As for Miss Toynbee, you would have said she had learned her phrases by heart

that morning; they were redolent of Madame de Sevigne's letters, and she laid traps to bring in her witticisms.

Tottie had been unusually quiet. All at once she burst forth, addressing herself to de Jençay:

"Monsieur, what did the spider do, when it came out of the ark?"

"Mademoiselle!"

"Shall I tell you, It took a fly and went home."

De Jençay spoke English as most Frenchmen do, and his attempts to come to an understanding of Tottie's question and answer caused that propounder of riddles to swallow her tea the wrong way, and to be ignominiously sent out of the room.

As for Uncle Dan he looked and behaved like a surly mastiff. Every time de Jençay's eyes turned in the direction of May, Uncle Dan uttered something between a snarl and a growl.

Mr. Sinclair gave his guest the option of going with him to see Edinburgh, or of riding with the ladies.

The Count at once chose the latter alternative. "I leave you in good hands," said Mr. Sinclair, adding, "Cattie—take care of Queen Mab's shoulder; no leaping to-day."

The younger girls accompanied the father to the front gate giving him sundry pattings and kisses. Miss Sinclair then turned to de Jençay and said, "Luncheon will be on the table at half-past one, and the horses at the door at three. Perhaps you would like to go to the library. My uncle will be so good as to show you the way."

M. de Jençay considered the suggestion as tantamount to a command, and followed his surly conductor with a temper somewhat ruffled.

"You shouldn't have been in such a hurry, Bessie," said Cattie. "The Count wouldn't have eaten us up, had you let him stay with us."

"Men have no business in the drawing-room of a morning, and I shall take care to avoid having to reproach myself with any flirtations."

"No one would ever suspect you of such an impropriety," retorted Cattie.

"It is not for myself I speak."

"For May then—or for me. I don't see that to take pleasure in a person's society must necessarily be flirting. I should have enjoyed asking this gentleman questions about France."

"You can do so when my father is present. It

is impossible for young women to be too prudent; we must not only be really free of blame, but appear to be so."

"Oh! Bessie, Bessie, with your ideas, we should go through life without any enjoyment."

"I can conceive no enjoyment coupled with an appearance of wrong doing."

"You are resolved on walking with hard peas in your shoes. I mean to boil mine;" and Cattie sauntered out of the room.

"Do you think I was wrong, May?" asked Bessie.

"I never think you wrong, dear; but poor M. de Jençay did look very like a child sent away in disgrace."

Here they caught the sound of Cattie's voice ringing through the house, "And there's nobody coming to woo-oo-oo—" Such a cadence as she made on that last syllable!

May said, "It vexes me to see that you and Cattie are not such good friends as you used to be. Why is it?"

"I disapprove of many of Cattie's ways. She does not sufficiently remember that she is not our

father's daughter. I cannot bear to see her behaving to him as if she were so."

May looked puzzled and distressed.

Miss Sinclair suddenly changed the conversation by expressing her regret that she had not bid her father remember the fish—it might be a *maigre* day, for what any one knew, and what was then to be done with the Frenchman; and with a heightened colour, the only sign of vexation she ever gave, Miss Sinclair took her way to the kitchen.

In the meantime Uncle Dan had led the Count to the library, a room quite forty feet long, all the side walls covered with books—a painted window at the north end, to the south a glass door opening on a lawn, surrounded by a high hedge of bush. Uncle Dan unlocked the book-cases, pointed to the library ladder, showed M. de Jençay that there were pens, ink and paper on the table, and then said, "I will leave you to write and read in peace."

"It appears I am to be a prisoner here for some hours," thought the Frenchman. "I wonder if smoking be allowed. I wish I had asked the cross old man."

After taking a cursory view of the books, de Jençay

sat down to write to his mother. One page of his paper was filled with imprecations against the passage across the Channel, the second and last was as little explicit as possible about the Sinclair family. There was no habit of confidence, we know, between mother and son. Mrs. Patterson would not have exaggerated had she written, instead of that they differed on most points, that they differed on all. One of the Count's griefs against his mother was the marriage of his only sister. The dowager had listened to no argument on the subject, and had given her pretty elegant young daughter to a Brittany boor, simply because he was the bearer of a great name.

The Marquis de Trevéguen had, indeed, every one of the defects of his class, besides those nature had specially bestowed on him. His intelligence was imbedded in all the superstitions of Papistry,

He was stupid, ignorant, and ill-looking. He drank as the Britons do, of whom Madame de Sevigné wrote, "as much wine goes into their bodies as water under their bridges;" but he was the Marquis de Trevéguen. Armand de Jençay paid one visit, and but one to the Chateau de Trevéguen. On that occasion his pious brother-in-law gave him to understand that

he was doubtful whether Science had not blundered as to the rotation of the earth round the sun.

From the period of that visit Armand and his mother had been on cold terms.

His note finished, the young man went out into the enclosure before the library door; and by way of improving his English, he took with him a gaily bound volume, on the title-page of which was "Ariadne . . . ."

Was it possible? Had he slept? If so, what had awakened him? The flight of some startled bird, or the peeping of some curious Dryad?

His book was lying open by his side. Was it the wind which had covered him with rose petals?—a shower of them had fallen on his hair. He rose stealthily to his feet, and looked through the hedge: not a scrap of a muslin dress did he espy. Count Armand was tolerably well accustomed to little adventures of the sort. In spite of Miss Cattie's criticism, he was undoubtedly a fine-looking man, with an air of distinction; or was it "un air noble"—a something individual, or a something inherited? His features were decidedly not those of the present generation of his countrymen, stamped as they are

by narrow ambitions. The lines of his face were bold; his lips, though they could never round themselves to anything approaching a heart-shape, had nothing of the dragged look of a speculator. There was an expression of melancholy in his eye, and a touch of irony in the mouth, which, in general, attracted and pleased women.

"Ah! these little girls! these little girls?" he muttered, as he shook off the petals. "I wonder which of them has amused herself at my expense? I hope it is the youngest."

As the half-hour after one sounded, a demure parlour-maid, having an absurd resemblance in dress and manner to Miss Sinclair, sought and found him, to announce that luncheon was on the table.

"It will be in the first look that I shall discover my fair challenger," he said to himself; and on entering the dining-room his eye glanced rapidly from one young face to another. He fancied there was defiance in Cattie's strange blue eyes; but at that instant Miss Toynbee entered, and Cattie exclaimed,—

"Dear T——, you scatter roses as you move."

"Oh, my poor rose!" exclaimed the governess;

adding, in French, "You have not lived even the life of a rose."

Was it possible that the perpetrator of the attack on his peaceful slumbers could be the mature governess? He made a wry face at the notion; and then detecting a mischievous smile on Cattie's lips, his opinion once more veered round to suspecting her. They were scarcely seated when the door was pushed a little open, and a lady squeezed through the small aperture she had made for herself.

"Aunt Polly!" exclaimed a chorus of voices; and every one rose to receive the new comer.

"I thought I would just step up to see how you were coming on. *Bon jour, Mooseer.* You find yourself pretty comfortable among us, I hope. We are not such barbarians as your country-folks think. Nations are always so unjust to one another, always longing to break the peace."

"My aunt, Mrs. Johnson, of Polwheble, Count de Jençay," said Bessie; seizing the pause to present the strangers in form to one another.

For a minute or two Mrs. Johnson was checked by Bessie's solemn formality, but she quickly cast the curb from between her teeth. Apropos to nothing,

as it would seem, but in reality following out the current of her secret thoughts, she addressed de Jençay,—

"Your young ladies, I hear, are all shut up till they are married; with us, now, they do pretty much as they please till they get a husband. For my part, I can't take on me to say which plan is best; girls are plagues anyhow. And then, as to Romanists and Protestants, it's a riddle to me. I suppose they are both pretty nearly right."

"Aunt Polly!" called out Tottie. "Do you know how young ladies like Cupid to visit them?"

"I wish you would find out your sisters' desires on that subject, my dear."

"With a ring, of course, Aunt Polly; but not without a rap. Do you understand?"

Uncle Dan, who was carving the cold round of beef, interrupted Tottie, by desiring her to hand a plate to her aunt.

"No, my dear; a glass of cold water. Good water, good air, and plenty of both cure all maladies, even love. The French, I am told, have neither."

"Aunt Polly," began Tottie again, "why should there be more weddings in winter than in summer?

Dear old thing; you give it up, don't you? Because the gentlemen want comforters, and the ladies muffs and boas."

"I don't see the connection between muffs and boas and matrimony, Tottie."

"Then why is a silly fellow called a muff?" went on the irrepressible Tottie. "I'll tell you. Because he holds a pretty girl's hand without squeezing it."

"Don't be so silly, Tottie," said Miss Sinclair.

"Be quiet, Tiggles," whispered Cattie. "Lucky for you, lass, that your riddles are riddles to the somebody you mean them for."

The insinuation did silence Tottie.

"Young girls are kept in better order in your country, no doubt, Mooseer?" said Mrs. Johnson, again turning her attention to de Jençay. "Where it will end with us the Lord knows."

It was in vain to try to divert Aunt Polly's attention from de Jençay. She was a woman of few ideas, but many words, which she cast in the path of her neighbours like loose pebbles. She was a new type of womankind to the Count; something hitherto unknown in dress, looks, and manner. The first was as incongruous as a British woman could con-

trive to make it. The mantle belonged to one season, the gown to another, the bonnet to a third. The gloves were of white kid, that had seen many a tea-party. But notwithstanding her queer exterior, Aunt Polly never made a disagreeable impression on any one. She had a youthful candour and simplicity, that, contrasting with her years, spoke audibly to her being a good woman. She did occasionally make an effort to look shrewd, to be what she called piquante; but her round, rosy face remained as invincibly benevolent as her character. The very odd assortment of her attire arose partly from her love of giving away. "Anything does for me," she would say, in reply to her nieces' remonstrances.

The Miss Sinclairs, much as they liked Aunt Polly, were always on the alert to keep her in the dark as to all they did. They knew her to be a more dangerous auxiliary than adversary. Before the end of luncheon de Jençay was aware that Mrs. Johnson, of Polwheble, was "*un enfant terrible.*"

CHAPTER III.

AN ENTHUSIAST FOR MATRIMONY.

It is pleasant to canter on springy turf by the side of lovely girls, a sharp sea-breeze brightening eyes and cheeks, loosening braided hair and flinging it in long curls to glisten in the sunshine. "Very pleasant, and very odd," thought Armand de Jençay, as he rode along with May and Cattie, their only chaperon a grey-haired groom.

The girls were very demure when they set off; but after the first canter their reserve thawed, and the conversation became as merry as youth and health could make it. Old Tom himself grinned at the sound of those bursts of girlish laughter. They were giving de Jençay a lesson in English, Cattie, of course, taking the lead, and thrusting all sorts of difficulties on him.

"What was the badge on her cap?"

"A *chardon*."

"Not at all—nothing so common. It was a thistle."

"Tistle?"

"No, thistle. Did he know the motto? Ah! he didn't. Well, she would teach it to him as soon as she could find one."

Then the girls took hands, and set off at a gallop, the groom calling to de Jençay, "Stoppy, Monsir. You make missy's mare wild." And to illustrate his meaning Tom pretended to fall from his own horse. Very wild Miss Cattie and the mare were. After a little, May had to let go her companion's hand, and away went Queen Mab, like an arrow from a bow.

"Tell him, Miss May, no need to be uneasy," said old Tom, riding up. "If ever there were the soul of a jockey in a young lady's body, it's in Miss Cattie's."

De Jençay and May were thus left tête-à-tête. The view of the sea was, at this point, shut out by rowan trees; their crimson berries, swung by the wind, flashed like flames. The scenery was as novel

to the young Frenchman as his situation. He had never been alone with a young lady in his life. It had been strange enough when there had been two; but one! He was wondering of what he might talk to her, when she put an end to his embarrassment by beginning a series of questions as to French ways of life. Now Cattie was away, May ventured to speak French: it was almost as pretty as the broken words of a little child. The voice was a quiet voice, a sort of sweet monotony in it; a contrast to that many-toned instrument of Miss Cattie, which, when she chose, enabled her to sway her hearers much as she pleased. May's maiden reserve made de Jençay feel as though there were an invisible wall separating them. He addressed her as he might have done some girl queen. He felt as if in her presence he ought to ride bareheaded: he enjoyed that quarter of an hour more than he remembered ever to have done any other.

And May? ah! poor little tender heart. No man can guess how the softness of looks and voice, often involuntary and unconscious, we will allow, can affect a woman's life. Men write and say that women are receptive; pity that they reflect on the fact only after they have verified it.

Well, May and the French Count rode side by side in the path skirting the copse of rowan-trees with their harvest of coral berries swung by the summer wind, and she ever and anon looked at him, to reach more clearly the meaning of his words; and looking, she saw and felt the tenderness and admiration, softening yet brightening that brown French face. Nothing but the meeting of their eyes, and then curiously enough it seemed to May that she had discovered in this stranger a dear, long-known friend. A little seed fell into their hearts that would have become a goodly tree sheltering their lives, but for one prejudiced, idolizing, interfering old man.

After a short pause of silence, during which they had let their horses walk, May suddenly roused up, and exclaimed, "We must really look for Cattie," and shaking her reins, she put Black Sultan into a canter.

At some hundred yards further on, where the wood abruptly ceases, a bridle-path leads down to the sea. Cattie was on the sands, letting the waves so gently rolling in wash over Queen Mab's feet. The moment she caught sight of the two

riders, she lifted her Glengarry, waving it repeatedly. The slant rays of the sun lighted up her hair, so that it had the appearance of a glory round her head.

"What a picturesque creature! She looks as if she had come direct from fairy-land," said de Jençay.

"And so clever; you should hear her sing," returned dear May.

"You consider her as a sister?"

"Oh, quite!"

"She is older than you, I should say?"

"A little — only two years. Shall we go on faster?"

They trotted down the declivity, and were soon close to Cattie.

"You make me think of one of Ossian's heroines, Miss Cattie." De Jençay used the name he heard others use; he did not recollect having heard any other.

"Do you read Ossian?" she asked; "not in English, surely."

"No; in Italian. I am told the original gains in the translation."

"I cannot believe that."

"Would you like to make the comparison?"

"Do you travel about with your library?"

"No; but there is the post."

"Thanks; I don't believe I know enough of Italian to be a judge. What wouldn't I give to go to Italy."

"Wish it strongly enough, and the wish will come to pass. We make the events of our lives."

"I do not believe that if I did I should be perfectly happy. But even my experience shows me that we are the slaves of circumstances. Shakspeare supports my opinion."

"That is being a fatalist, is it not? My meaning is, that our characters make the events of our lives."

"Then I am sure my life will be a strange medley," said Cattie.

"We have not heard what Miss Sinclair thinks on the matter," said De Jençay.

"I believe in free-will," said May, in a low voice.

"And election," muttered Cattie, with a dry laugh.

That evening Mrs. Johnson surpassed herself. Bessie and May had lectured their father on the necessity of keeping Aunt Polly in order. They were very really alarmed at what she might say to the stranger; for never in their memory had she failed to put them out of countenance when any unmarried man was present. During dinner, Mr. Sinclair, ofttimes admonished by the beseeching looks of his elder daughters, had stopped the unconscious lady as she was nearing the perilous topic of marriage. Yes; though the conversation might be distant as the poles from that subject, she found the way to bring it to that equator of her imagination. As soon as the ladies were alone in the drawing-room, she began her catechism.

"Well, girls, do you approve of your visitor? —a fine, handsome man, that's my opinion, and I don't care who hears it, my dears."

There was a wonderful unanimity in the answer Mrs. Johnson got from Bessie, May, and Cattie— "No; he was not in the *very* least handsome."

"I think him a perfect darling," said Tottie.

"You should not speak so, even when we are alone," said Miss Sinclair, aghast.

"Why not?" asked Tottie.

"Keep your thoughts, at least such thoughts, to yourself," said Cattie. You are too old to go on in that way."

"I am sure you girls are enough to puzzle Solomon himself. You are very well, but you are not such Venuses as to have any right to Apollos."

"Venus was not in any way attached to Apollo, Mrs. Johnson," observed Cattie.

"My dear, of course I know Vulcan was her husband, and that's a broad hint that beauty on one side is enough."

"When is love deformed, Aunt Polly?" cried out Tottie. "I'll tell you: when it is all on one side."

"But this young man is good looking—a trifle brownish; but that's to be expected. I never saw a better-made coat on a man's back, and he is modest; but that's perhaps owing to his ignorance of our tongue. Frenchmen are not famed for modesty."

"One of themselves said they were a happy combination of monkey and tiger," said Cattie.

"How you do set upon the poor fellow," exclaimed Tottie. "It just makes me mad."

"Really I don't know what to make of you young girls; not the least like girls in my time."

"Did they make offers of marriage?" asked Cattie.

"No, my dear; but they didn't take pleasure in preventing their being made. It's a downright wonder to every one who knows us, that here you all are, withering on the virgin stalk."

Miss Toynbee said,—"That comparison only suits me, Mrs. Johnson."

"Well, ma'am, I dare say you have your regrets for opportunities thrown away; beauties, young ladies, are apt to sit out their market."

Cattie put up her lip in disdain, saying,—"How I do hate hearing people talk as if the sole end and aim of a woman's being was to be married."

"And pray for what other reason do you think she was created?" asked Mrs. Johnson.

"It's too disgusting!" exclaimed Cattie. "May, come and play a duet,"

They had scarcely begun before M. de Jençay

came into the room. Cattie played extremely well, and de Jençay listened with the ears of a connoisseur. He made some remarks which led Cattie to say,—

"I am sure you play yourself, or perhaps you sing—that would be delightful; we have such loads of duets and trios."

He said,—"But I can only sing French."

She turned to the music-stand to seek for something of Auber, when up came Mrs. Johnson.

"Ah! so you are fond of music, Mooseer? What's your opinion of these young ladies' playing? May wants physical force, and Cattie hasn't softness enough — splash-dash I say; but I am going to refer a matter in dispute to you—you will be a good judge, being, I may say, out of the question. Now, don't you think with me that girls ought to marry?"

"I can conscientiously agree with you Madame," said de Jençay, laughing heartily.

"Well, of course it's stupid to be so particular, so difficult to please. No man has been perfection since Adam, and if girls are to wait till they find another like our first father, there

must be an end of the world, as a friend of mine said, if there were only her and fish."

"Will you look at these duets, M. de Jençay," interrupted Cattie.

"Just let me finish what I have to say, my dear. I am told that in your country, Mooseer, papas and mammas pair off the young people at the proper time, and it's my private idea that it answers just as well as our national custom of long courtship. How much did Jacob know of Rachel after twice seven years of love-making?"

"The patriarch ought to have been highly flattered by the lady's patience and constancy. I don't believe the case could be paralleled," said de Jençay.

The two girls left the piano, and with their departure all the Count's interest in the conversation vanished.

"Ah! it's a great pity. Youth makes itself wings. Bessie was really a handsome creature some seven years ago. I never thought we should have kept her so long."

"It must be the effect of her own choice, Madame."

"Well, yes; but *why* can't she find some one to suit her? I didn't like doctors or lawyers myself. I preferred Art. Well, sir, I had just to put up with farming, and I'm none the worse."

Mr. Sinclair was here sent to the rescue: he carried off his sister for a game of chess with Uncle Dan, and then Cattie and May came back to the piano; and they tried over first a duet from "Le Chalet," and then they found that charming one from "Les Voitures Renversées," to the air of "Au clair de la lune."

The moment Cattie found that de Jençay could teach her something, her manner changed, and he beheld her in one of her bewitching moods. They practised the duet so long that at last Mr. Sinclair begged for a truce, and then the rest of the evening passed as evenings usually do in families such as that of the Sinclairs, in looking over books, photographs, in pleasant desultory chat about pictures, music, and literature, with a little seasoning of politics. Cattie was very grand on this last topic, very indignant at the want of liberty of the press in France. Might people have a ball without asking leave of the police? and then never

to be sure that one's letters were not opened, and to have *Punch* stopped! It was enough to prevent the English living in France.

"They come, notwithstanding," said de Jençay. "You hear as much English in Paris as French. Some day I hope you will all come and see if we are not better than our reputation."

It was one of those pleasant evenings which are only possible when no strong feelings are in play. All was subdued: lights, voices, laughter. Suddenly the charm was broken; Uncle Dan knocked over the chess-board, and left the room in a huff.

"I'm sure I don't know how I won," said Mrs. Johnson, in dismay; "but what's done is done, and there's no help for it. Well, Mooseer, I hope you are pleased with our domestic circle?"

Before de Jençay could reply, Cattie had exclaimed, "Very tea-trayish."

"Tea-trayish!" repeated the Count.

"It's what the tea-things are put on," explained Tottie.

De Jençay looked more than ever puzzled, but he understood that Cattie had uttered some sarcasm.

"I mean that our domestic circle has nothing

particularly artistic or supernaturally delightful" explained Cattie in French, and speaking in a low voice.

"All over the world," said de Jençay, addressing himself to Mrs. Johnson, "the virtues and happiness of English homes are celebrated."

"Very nicely said," whispered Cattie; but Mrs. Johnson, with true Scotch aptitude for argument, went on,—

"Oh! I am not for saying, Mooseer de Jençay, that there's no such thing as unhappiness or shortcomings among us; but as a rule, why I believe we may claim the advantage over other nations."

"We do not shine in modesty, I think," said Mr. Sinclair.

"It's your own novels, sir, give us such a dreadful idea of your morals. Deed, they're far from good reading. For instance, that what's his name—a fellow who pushes another—a ne'er-do-weel—out of his house with his stomach—David, is it?—No!—lions—Daniel? I told Mr. Johnson the story, and he said I might have been better employed than reading such trash. And then that

peeping through a key-hole at a girl saying her prayers: it frightens one against travelling in France."

"I'm afraid your studies, Madame, will have left no hope of your believing any good of France or the French."

"I am not so sure of that," returned the lady, her head on one side, with an attempt at a coquettish air, quite comical.

On this there was a general rise of all the girls—they kissed the father of the family, and shook hands in a kindly manner with the stranger.

This night there was no meeting for any confidential chat. Each young lady retired in a matter-of-fact way to her respective room. Cattie sat down at her open window; her eyes were fixed on the calm heaven above, but her thoughts never went so high—no, though there streamed down upon her a pure ray from the brightest of planets.

Memory was taking Cattie back some half-dozen years. We have periods of forgetfulness of the past—it actually seems obliterated; but memory has its lumber-room, where all which we are not using is put aside, and, one day or other, voluntarily or

involuntarily, we go thither. Cattie was doing so involuntarily. She was recalling her childhood passed in all the splendour of a civilian in high place in India. Then came the death of her father, and the poverty of her mother, with not a penny, save her widow's pension—downright poverty compared with the income of her husband's post. How well Cattie remembered all that poor mother's lamentations over the past, her terrors for the future of her daughter! How they had wandered from place to place on the Continent in search of cheapness and luxury! Her mother's deplorings as to her darling's want of beauty, sounded again in her ears. "You must go to India, my child," said Mrs. Leighton; "you'll never find a husband anywhere else, my unlucky child. And oh! Cattie, never forget your poor mother's words—better never marry at all, than a man without property. See what has been the consequence of my trusting to a man's life for an income!"

When Cattie was sixteen she and her mother were living at Bourges, and Mrs. Leighton, who was not troubled with any religious qualms, sent Cattie as a day-scholar to the convent. The music-

master, who was proud of his pupil, one day proposed that she should sing the "Agnus Dei" of the mass he had composed in honour of the Bishop's annual visit. There was a little doubt whether it would be admissible, considering that Miss Leighton was a Protestant, but the glory and advantage that such singing would bring to the convent-school, conquered the Lady Superior's scruples.

Cattie's voice on that occasion was the topic of conversation in Bourges for a month—and this admiration turned Mrs. Leighton's thoughts in a new direction.

"Dear child," said the loving weak woman, "if you have not a pretty face, you have an angel's voice. What a sensation you have made; all the great ladies have been complimenting me, and begging for the honour of our acquaintance. I'll tell you what, Cattie, you shall go on the stage; though you haven't beauty, your figure promises well—you have nice hands and feet. Men go mad for a fashionable actress or singer. I won't hear of your going to India; and if anything happens to me, drown yourself rather than be a governess.

Oh! my darling, perhaps I may live to see a coronet on your dear little head!"

It seemed to Cattie, now sitting in the rays of that lovely planet, as though her mother's voice was in her ear: "I should be satisfied if I could see a coronet on that dear little head." She felt as though warm kisses were on her curls. She held out her arms whispering—"Mamma, mamma!" She had adored that soft simpleton, who had never once had a rational idea of life, who had always chosen the accessory instead of the principal. It was the little daily spoilings, the gentle yielding that endeared the weak mother to the gifted high-tempered daughter. They became, as it were, joint conspirators.

Cattie laboured hard in her vocation. She had the true artist's temperament, ardent, easily excited, easily depressed, ambitious, greedy of praise, passionate rather than tender. All her professors predicted a future of glory for her. If at sixteen, her mother had said truly that Cattie was not pretty, at eighteen it would have been difficult to deny that she might claim to possess beauty—not beauty as the ancients understood it, but such as

the moderns best like and appreciate—a something capricious, mobile, strange; the refined result of the working of the mind on plastic features.

The mother and daughter had gone to Interlachen for a holiday. They were full of hope; Cattie persuaded that in her slender throat she held fame and fortune, and what Cattie believed was gospel for her mother.

The Sinclairs were also at Interlachen that year, and often met the mother and daughter in their various excursions. At watering-places people the least given to gossip begin to speculate about their neighbours, and to watch their proceedings. The Sinclairs made no exception to the rule; they had names for those they habitually saw. There were the Doves, and the Sparrows, and the Jays, and Madame Giraffe, and Monsieur Grayboots. Cattie and her mother they called Hen and Chick.

"Poor things!" said Mr. Sinclair one day, when his daughters had drawn his attention to the pair.

"They seem very comfortable!" replied Bessie.

"I pitied them because when I see two people so all in all to one another, I think of the uncertainty of life," was the grave rejoinder.

Not many days later May observed, "Hen and Chick must be gone. I have not seen them for a week."

That very evening the bells tolled for Mrs. Leighton. Then some ladies who were in the same Pension, came and lamented to the Sinclairs the situation of the poor girl, who seemed to have no friends, and to be left quite to herself. They could not think what was to come of her. She was very haughty and reserved, and repelled all their advances. Even the English chaplain could obtain no further confidence from her than that she was waiting for letters.

Miss Leighton became the object of public interest. We talk and write much of the selfishness, and worldiness, and snobbishness of mankind, but who has not examples to cite of benevolence, disinterestedness, and charity. Mr. Pitt, who is an authority, said he had found men better than their reputation. Many hearts in Interlachen were sore for the friendless orphan girl—none more so than those of the Sinclair family.

One evening Mr. Sinclair went out for his usual solitary walk by the lake: a night such as this, on

which Cattie sits at her window thinking of the past,—a gentle air making the leaves whisper, a dusty multitude of stars, with one planet outshining all the rest, disturbing, exciting, as the fixed glance of a brilliant eye, whose meaning we cannot reach.

Mr. Sinclair, as was his wont when alone, was repeating aloud some favourite verses, when he came upon a lady in black, whom he at once recognised to be Miss Leighton. He lifted his hat, and passed on. But he turned to look after her, and saw that she had seated herself on the bank, and so close to the lake that her feet were almost in the water. An impulse made him retrace his steps.

He said, "Pray don't be alarmed by my speaking to you; but it is too late for you to be here alone."

"I am not afraid," she answered.

"That is because you are ignorant of the risks you run."

"I am not such a baby as you think."

"Is it not like a child to court danger? I have daughters of my own, as old or older than you, and I should not allow them to take solitary walks at this hour."

"I am alone in the world, and must learn to take care of myself."

"Do you object to having some conversation with me? My name is Sinclair."

"I know who you are; you are the father of the young lady with that funny little dog."

He smiled to himself at this speech, from the girl who had asserted her power to take care of herself.

He sat down by her. "At your age you ought to be with friends."

"But if I haven't any? not an uncle or aunt in the world. Some distant cousins—stupid, disagreeable people, who write me sermonizing letters, and advise me to do what I never will. I would rather throw myself into this lake."

"A summary and wicked proceeding."

"I am not a bit afraid of dying, not a bit. I saw my mother die——."

Here the steady voice suddenly broke into a plaintive quiver, the girl pressed her hands hard together, and her head went down on her breast. It was evident she was fighting against a burst of tears.

Mr. Sinclair was a tender-hearted man. He could not find courage to speak at that instant to the orphan. At last he said, conscious that it would not do for him to be seen sitting at that hour by the side of the poor girl,—

"Will you let me take you home? I do not like to leave you here."

She got up and walked in silence by his side to the Pension. She held out her hand to him, when he bade her "good night."

The next day, Mr. Sinclair took his eldest daughter and Miss Toynbee to call on Miss Leighton, and invite her to spend the day with them. She interested them all, even Bessie. Never had they before met with such a strange combination of child and woman as in this friendless young thing. And then her singing—they could never hear enough of it, and thus, day after day, Cattie went to the Sinclairs.

The more he saw of her, the more her deserted state weighed on Mr. Sinclair's mind. The Scotch, with all that appearance of shrewdness and caution which has gained for them the epithet "canny," have an enthusiasm in their nature, which ofttimes

leads a Scot to do what their English brother would call a foolish proceeding. The more Mr. Sinclair pondered as to the future of this waif and stray thrown in his path, the more it seemed to him that the only possible arrangement was to take her with them when they left Interlachen. He pleaded the cause of the fatherless with his eldest daughter, and so far gained it, that Bessie agreed to Miss Leighton being invited to stay with them until she had decided on her future plans.

"Really, and really, you will take me with you!" cried Cattie in a rapture of gratitude, kissing Mr. Sinclair's hand; "but," with sudden recollection, "I don't know if I have money enough for the journey;" and she gave her little purse to Mr. Sinclair.

"You are our visitor from this moment," he said, returning the purse.

Cattie was silent; but her change of colour showed how agitated she was.

"How can I ever repay you?" she whispered.

"Be a good girl."

"Indeed I will try."

Six years had gone by since that day, and till

within the last few months there had been perfect harmony among the girls. Uncle Dan, indeed, had been the only one of the family who had not long since become reconciled to Cattie's adoption. We know, and with what nonsuccess, she had at twenty-one proposed to follow out her mother's projects for her. To Miss Toynbee alone had Cattie confided the anxiety that had taken hold of her.

"I see it coming, T.," she often said, "I shall have to go away."

It was at this epoch that Count Armand de Jençay came to Mayfield.

To-night as Cattie sat at her window recalling the past, her thoughts fell into the dark hereafter, and a mysterious echo reached her.

CHAPTER IV.

UNCLE DAN SETS HIS TRAP.

TEN days went by, and still the Count was at Mayfield. Bessie wondered why he did not go. Almost every one who came to the house asked when he was going. She surmised that people were "beginning to talk" and "to conjecture," and the surmise was gall and wormwood to her. It brought back the wretched feelings she had had when kind friends had made such minute and suggestive inquiries about Miss Toynbee, and three years later, she had again been vexed by hints and insinuations as to Cattie; and now, after a period of truce from any similar annoyances, here this Frenchman was going to give her no end of worry. What could he be staying for? They had had two state dinners, he had seen everyone and everything worth seeing

in Edinburgh; they had had a pic-nic to Hawthorndean, which had given her toothache and earache, they had been to Abbotsford and to Melrose; what could he mean by staying there?

What a ten days it had been to her! Not one of those who saw her could imagine how painful had been her task. Remaining in the drawing room when she was wanted elsewhere, because she would not leave Cattie or May with *that* man. A downright martyrdom it was, to have the consciousness that she was playing the part of a bore, and at the same time to be pretty certain she was not doing much good. One girl after the other gave her cause of uneasiness; yes, even that mere child Tottie. The "mere child" had come one morning into Bessie's room in a rage to complain of May—May, of all girls in the world!—accusing her of having gone out without waiting till Tottie was dressed! "And I saw her," wound up the angry complainant, "I saw her walking with the Count up the avenue; I did with my own eyes."

Bessie, with wonderful command of herself, said, "Well, run after them;" and Tottie had done so with a boot on one foot and a shoe on the other.

Bessie was cruelly uncomfortable. She had no fault to find with the visitor. She could not honestly, and she was always honest in her judgments, accuse him of flirting with the girls. In truth, Tottie had the greatest share of his attention; it was Tottie who made him read English, who corrected his pronunciation, and who was always ready to help him out of any difficulties. Nor was there anything to blame in Cattie's or May's manner. A horrible suspicion sometimes crossed her mind as to her beloved sister. She would have given much to have whispered a word of counsel to May, to have pointed out to her the snares and pitfalls into which an unwise attachment might lead her. But there was something in May which closed Bessie's lips. It would have been like insulting the purity of an angel; was it possible that such a delicate, white, ethereal being, the personification of Bessie's idea of a saint, could love, and love a Frenchman, dark enough into the bargain for the spirit of evil! Bessie would decide that it was impossible until she again saw May in the presence of the Count.

"Cattie? Oh! as to Cattie, it would be only natural!" and Bessie saw no objection to such a

match—only there must be the strictest propriety in all the previous proceedings. Bessie would allow no girl considered a member of the family to compromise herself. She had watched Cattie narrowly, but had discovered in her none of the symptoms her woman's instinct had apprehended in May. If Cattie smiled sweetly or listened with captivating attention to the Count one hour, the next she manifested such indifference, or answered him so mockingly, that Bessie was puzzled. Besides, Cattie would have nothing to do with M. de Jençay's music, avoided singing with him, and slighted his sketches.

"You would have a better chance of happiness," said Mr. Sinclair one day to her, when she had been ridiculing the Count's talents, "if you were less fastidious or as good-natured as M. de Jençay."

"I allow he is too good-natured, he praises everyone's singing and playing."

"Ah! I understand, you would have him only alive to your superior merits," said Uncle Dan.

"I do not care for the admiration of a universal admirer," retorted Cattie.

In a letter that Miss Leighton wrote at this

time to one of her girl friends, she spoke thus of M. de Jençay: "I can assure you, dear Minnie, he is not in the least dangerous to my peace; I almost wish he were. I want to feel that wonderful feeling which is said to take all self out of one: M. de Jençay will never teach me this. He is rather good-looking, tall enough, and thin enough; he is well bred, comes in and goes out of a room better than any man I ever saw. I try in vain to find out what's the secret of the manœuvre. He understands something of music and painting. I don't think him a fool; but as to his inspiring what you are pleased to style a profound eternal attachment—never, never, never! It's not in him to do it, my dear. In the meanwhile I am improving my French, and amusing myself at the same time. Poor Bessie is in a fever to get rid of this Gaul. Query, is he a Gaul, or a Frank? I must ask him."

There had been one singular change during these ten days. Uncle Dan, who had received the Frenchman with a snarl and a growl, now often sought his company; they had occasional tête-à-tête walks, when the Count smoked his after-dinner cigar.

What could be the point of union between these two?

If any one had divined the principal subject Uncle Dan chose for his conversation, the topics he always managed to entertwine with whatever else they spoke about, the puzzle would have been greater. Uncle Dan was making use of the cunning of the serpent, setting aside the guilelessness of the dove. No one could have suspected him of possessing such powers of pathos, as he displayed in relating Cattie's story; neither could any one have believed that he had such a just appreciation of her talents. Uncle Dan went so far against his conscience as to blame his brother for having prevented Miss Leighton from profiting by her voice, to secure to herself an independence.

"But in your country," had replied de Jençay, "there can be no doubt of so attractive a person marrying. You English do not stipulate for a dowry; you follow the dictates of your heart."

"Well," said Uncle Dan, closing his eyes and quivering his eyelids—a way he had when he had no mind that his thoughts should be investigated—"Well, to a certain extent you judge

us rightly. If we love a woman, we try our best to get her to marry us, whether she has money or not; but Miss Leighton is not one who will be easily pleased. I believe she would far rather work for her bread than marry from interested motives; and feeling her poverty, she will put a strict guard on any demonstration of partiality, lest, you understand, she might be suspected of trying to make a good match."

There is, perhaps, nothing more alarming in the intercourse of man with man than the facility with which false impressions can be conveyed. That was what Uncle Dan did during the latter part of the Count's visit.

One morning Miss Sinclair was told by the demure parlour-maid that the French gentleman was going away on the Friday. This was on a Wednesday. Moved by her secret uneasiness, Bessie went at once to May's room, and imparted the information, taking care to be looking out of the window as she did so. A momentary silence was broken by May's exclaiming, "How tiresome this hair is!" Bessie, turning round, saw May striving to fasten her plaits.

"Let me do it for you, dear."

"No, thanks." And then May added, with a certain sharpness of tone, "It will be a great relief to you."

"What, dear?"

"The Count's going. You have looked the picture of misery ever since he came."

Could this be May speaking?

Bessie answered, "I confess I am not sorry. It's awkward having a young man who is no relation staying so long in a house full of girls: and then, his being a Roman Catholic! Altogether, I am thankful. The excitement was getting too much for me; and we all want sea-bathing."

Bessie saw two small hands trembling.

"Let me finish your hair, May, or you will be too late for prayers."

May yielded, and as the elder sister touched the fingers of the younger, she felt they were cold as ice.

Perhaps, but for the incident of this hair-dressing, Bessie might have gone on to Cattie, and told her of the Count's intended departure; but before May's plaits were all arranged the bell for prayers rung.

At breakfast, de Jençay, addressing himself to

Bessie, said that he had at last found sufficient courage to tear himself from the charming society of Mayfield.

"Il me coute beaucoup, de m'en aller," he added in French, and he glanced round the table as if to make all there present feel they had a share in his regrets.

Uncle Dan looked at Cattie, and what with his stare and the surprise, she coloured, and aware that her flush might be observed made the flush deepen.

M. de Jençay went on with his little speech—tried it in English, broke down, and had to finish it in French.

"It would be selfish in us to press you to prolong your stay here, when Stranraer opens its hospitable gates to you;" and then Mr. Sinclair launched into a long description of the shooting of grouse and blackcock. "I believe I shall be able to procure you some deer-stalking."

The Count spoke his thanks as concisely as a Briton could have done.

Miss Toynbee said, "Ah, M. le Comte, you are just leaving us, when you were beginning to improve in your English."

"I shall forget never the kindness, the happiness, of this visit—my gratitude *shall* be everlasting."

The expression of his face confirmed his words.

"Ah, dear, dear!" went on the governess, "you have forgotten what I explained to you about the *shall* and the *will*."

"But I shall and will never forget my kind teacher," and he kissed Miss Toynbee's hand.

She reddened a little, and with an attempt to laugh, said—"It doesn't matter with me, but you must not kiss ladies' hands in this country."

"It is so natural—it expresses my feelings of respect better than your shake hands. That is good between men; to kiss a woman's hand is an act of homage."

"But you must not do it, except to old ladies, who are great ladies also; never to a governess, old or young."

"As a rule, I shall obey, but I will make exceptions."

This morning was unaccountably like the first one of the Count's visit. The intimacy that had grown up during the intervening time had vanished, there was no pleasant morning chat to discuss the

plans for the afternoon or evening. That was all at an end.

Mr. Sinclair asked, as he had asked a fortnight ago, if de Jençay preferred a ride, or if he had any business to do in Edinburgh; and de Jençay answered as he had done before, choosing the ride with the ladies.

"It would give me pleasure to go the same road as that of our first ride," he said to May and Cattie. The former smiled, and said, "Oh! yes;" the latter laughed, saying, "Quite sentimental."

De Jençay did not need Bessie's invitation to-day to go to the library, he took his way thither of his own accord. He felt a desire to be alone with his thoughts; he had not expected to regret so much as he did leaving Mayfield. He had long since made up his mind that tender emotions were things dead and buried for him. But hearts have their winter, and rebloom again in spring.

As soon as he had left the dining-room Miss Toynbee exclaimed, "That man is a thorough gentleman."

"A bit of a humbug," was the short rejoinder from Cattie.

"It was a kind heart dictated his compliment," persisted Miss Toynbee; "it was addressed to the oldest, the poorest, the plainest, the only dependent of the company."

"What makes you speak of yourself in that way?" said Cattie crossly; "it's not true; I am more dependent than you; but you only do so to enhance that person."

"You are a strange girl. I am afraid you have no heart."

Cattie let the subject drop.

Mrs. Johnson dropped in before lunch, and was told the news.

"I hope none of you are likely to have broken hearts," said the good lady. "At your age I am of opinion I should not have been over glad to see him go. A pleasant manner is a grand conjurer."

"I am broken-hearted, Aunt Polly, if that will satisfy you," said Tottie. "I am not laughing; I mean what I say. I never did like anybody so much."

"You are too old to talk such nonsense," said Bessie.

"Take my advice, Tottie, and don't you be an old maid," said Mrs. Johnson.

"I don't mean to, Aunt Polly;" and Tottie began singing, "'I won't be a nun, I won't be a nun.'"

"And what does Miss Cattie say to his going?" asked Aunt Polly in a confidential whisper, adding,— "I fancied she was just a wee bit touched. What a capital match it would be for her."

Bessie's answer was not to the point; her dislike of the subject, and her own private fears, made her observe, "I wish to Heaven he had never come!"

Aunt Polly at once surmised that there *was* something to tell; and to her the belief in a love affair at Mayfield was a real consolation. Never had she had a suspicion of anything of the sort before.

"Not May, I hope, my dear?" she said jesuitically.

Bessie answered hastily, "No, indeed!"

Uncle Dan was what we are accustomed to call "an estimable person." He gave to the poor, never got into debt, was precise in his religious duties, praised for his attachment to his family.

It is very common, even among those who diligently read the Gospels, to take for their motto, "Charity begins at home," and this was Uncle Dan's device. He disliked the stranger within his brother's gates. She was an alien to his blood—an alien to his religion. He wished they were well rid of her—but by fair means; he would do her no wrong. So he said to himself. In what he had been seeking to do he thoroughly persuaded himself he had her advantage as much in view as that of those belonging to him. When man or woman is beset by temptation, arguments in favour of it, and opportunities for yielding to it, never fail.

Uncle Dan went out after breakfast to sun himself in the long green walk, which on one side was bounded by the beech hedge of the library enclosure. It was there Aunt Polly found him, looking more than usually cross. Even when she bade him good morning his hands remained doggedly crossed behind his back.

"It's real bonnie here," began the good-tempered woman. "What with the cows so peaceable in yon green park, and the smell of the herbs, and the pleasant breeze, it's just another garden

of Eden; but there's no keeping vexations out of this one any more than the serpent out of the other."

"What's the woman driving at," growled Uncle Dan.

"Ba, brother, it's just about Moosur de Jençay."

Uncle Dan walked some steps hastily forward, then facing round on his sister, he said in a deliberate, raised voice. "I have had my doubts, but Miss Leighton has a brave spirit. She'll not let the Frenchman see she cares whether he goes or stays. She'd eat her heart out before she would let him guess he'd won it."

"Well; there's always a fair side to every black, and I am thankful to the Lord it's Miss Cattie, and none of the other poor lambs." She sniffed the air, then whispered, "Sure as death the Count's behind yon hedge. I smell his tobacco. It's to be hoped he's not heard us—it wouldn't be fair to the poor lass."

Uncle Dan's hopes ran in the other direction. Uncle Dan believed in Shakspeare's knowledge of human nature, and trusted that de Jençay had heard all he intended him to hear.

Had he done what he did from any kindly

motive, he might have been pardoned for thus striving to drift two individuals together, whom he had no reason for thinking had any preference for one another. Self, and self alone, had ruled him. The worst of it is that those who act wrongly towards others, are not only guilty themselves, but are the cause of evil in those against whom they have offended.

No man, be he young or old, hears that he is loved by a girl, such as Cattie Leighton, and keeps his blood cool—that of de Jençay, as Uncle Dan and Aunt Polly spoke, rose to boiling heat. Many a long day after, in speaking of that moment, he owned that he had sat at least half-an-hour with his head in his hands, trying to think steadily, as to how he ought to act. He also owned, that as he recovered his composure, his feeling was that of surprise—he was puzzled. He had never met one bashful look from Cattie. She had always been quite self-possessed in his company. She had hitherto appeared to him one of those exceptional women who revolve in an orbit of their own, having satellites; not one to be satisfied to shine by a borrowed light.

The extreme reserve of an English girl, still an article of faith with his countrymen, might certainly account for her careless manner towards him, yet he was puzzled, troubled, impatient. Could she have been the one to pelt him with rose leaves? He shrunk from the notion.

The agitation of his feeling showed itself in his features and in his embarrassed manner, when he met the ladies at luncheon. His silence was too marked to be overlooked.

"What has come over our noble guest?" said Cattie to May, as they went upstairs to put on their habits. "He looks as if some glamour had been cast on him since breakfast. And Aunt Polly, what can she mean by puffing like a steam-engine every time she looks at me?"

May ran away with tears in her eyes.

Cattie set off on her ride with a new-born idea that May's tears were connected with de Jençay's going away, and that leaving May was the cause of his gravity. Moved by good-nature she tried to keep Queen Mab either before or behind the others, but de Jençay so perseveringly drew back or hurried forward to her side, that Cattie gave up her tactics.

He had never been so agreeable to her before; his manner was more reserved than usual, he showed towards her a marked homage. "I can't make it out," thought Cattie; "perhaps he wants to engage me as an ally, but he will find himself mistaken; and how solemn May looks."

They went down to the sands and let the crisp waves come curling up to the horses' feet. The sun, low on the horizon, sent a long column of red light across the glassy sea. There was nothing living visible to them but their three selves on earth, and afar on the waters a boat, the sails gleaming white as it crossed the path of light.

"How silent we three be!" cried Cattie. "Shall I sing you a ditty to cheer you?" and without waiting for an answer, she sung,—

"Three corpses lay out on the shining sands
In the morning gleam as the tide went down,
And the women are weeping and wringing their hands
For those who will never come back to the town,
For men must work, and women must weep,
And the sooner it's over the sooner to sleep,
And good-by to the bar and its moaning."

How clear and piercing her voice rung out those dreary words. What a pathetic break in the last line!

"My Queen, you have spoiled my song," said Cattie, bending over her mare's neck to hide her emotion. She caught de Jençay's eye, and with sudden irritation she urged Queen Mab further into the sea. As de Jençay came to her side she used whip and curb and foot, to force on Queen Mab.

"Take care," said the Count, "she will be out of her depth directly. I can see it by the colour of the water."

"Go back if you are afraid," returned Cattie, by voice and hand pressing on Queen Mab.

"Have you ever been on the back of a horse swimming?" asked de Jençay.

"No; I should like to see what it is like."

"I beg of you to turn your horse."

"No; I never give up what I have begun. Pray go back to May; I can take care of myself."

"If you go on, I go on."

"I am not at all obliged to you," said the wilful girl.

Even as she spoke her heart quaked, for Queen Mab began to plunge in a way that showed her bravado wish was realized.

"Shut your eyes and hold your pommel," said de Jençay, speaking quickly in French.

Cattie felt as if she and her horse were spinning round and round.

"We shall be safe in a minute," said de Jençay, who had hold of her bridle. A very long minute it seemed, and then Cattie felt that the mare had her feet on solid ground again.

As Cattie opened her eyes, they met those of de Jençay fixed on her, and with an expression she had never before seen. For an instant she looked away; the next she again rallied.

"You have spoiled my adventure, M. de Jençay, and frightened May out of her senses, and all for nothing."

That was all she said to the man who had, to say the least, saved her from a great risk. He could not have believed it, had he not himself heard it. Dripping wet, and pale as death, she was still indomitable.

He tried to answer her in her own spirit.

"Have you an ocean grandfather, or a river uncle? If so, warn your friends, that they may refrain from spoiling your sport with the waters."

May, in the extremity of her terror, had jumped off her horse, and as he spoke de Jençay dismounted to help her into the saddle again. As he did so, May whispered,—"Don't fret her, or she may try it a second time."

De Jençay took the hint, and all the way home he devoted himself to May, which set Cattie wondering what that look in his eyes had meant.

They returned to Mayfield by cross roads and bye lanes, so that the dripping state of Cattie's habit and the general limpness of de Jençay's appearance might not attract notice. Of course the incident of the ride had to be mentioned on their arrival at home. Cattie, you may be sure, was as well lectured by Mr. Sinclair and Miss Toynbee as de Jençay was thanked. The young lady herself was impenitent, and carried her ingratitude so far as to declare she could not forgive M. de Jençay his interference. In her excitement she added that it was the second time she had been prevented trying the effects of the water cure.

The words were said: but they were the last wilful ones that evening. They had smote on her heart, bringing back vividly the grief that had

fallen on her at Interlachen. An orphan, friendless, poor, why did she thus thrust back kindness? Why was she so rebellious?

Absorbed and silent, she took no part in the conversation.

De Jençay took leave of the family after evening prayers. He was to leave Mayfield by one of the earliest trains the next morning. Very warmly he thanked Mr. Sinclair for his hospitality—very warmly he shook hands with the rest of the party. If he held Cattie's hand longer than was necessary, she made no complaint to any one. He said some confused words about meeting again, which no one answered, and then he was gone.

A general pause ensued after he had left the room, broken at last by Mr. Sinclair.

"A very fine young man."

"A thorough gentleman," added Miss Toynbee.

"Oh! quite a hero! but not a conqu'ring one," said Cattie. She had the grace to blush.

CHAPTER V.

TWO IN UNCLE DAN'S TRAP.

M. DE JENÇAY was gone, and Bessie Sinclair once more moved in maiden meditation, fancy free. She was once more mistress of her time. She could listen to the cook's long-winded discourse with patience; she could put her store-room, which had lately lost all its neatness, into order again; she could be upstairs or downstairs, in the house, or out of it, with an easy mind. It is necessary, perhaps, to have been placed in a similar situation, and to have a conscientiousness such as Bessie's, thoroughly to sympathize with her present feelings of relief. She was so unusually lively as to appear even a little flighty; nevertheless the home atmosphere was heavy.

May, always quiet, sat in her usual place near

the north window of the small drawing-room, which the girls used as a study. May generally put the hours between breakfast and lunch to profit, either in copying out music, or in painting flowers from nature. All her talents were as modest as herself. She was very successful in portraying a single flower, in a pretty diminutive vase—she was so employed now.

Cattie, whose practising formerly had been one of Miss Sinclair's worries, was now lying on a sofa, with the last new novel in her hand, turning over the pages so rapidly that it was clear she took no interest in her occupation. Cattie was working a problem in her head.

Supposing *that* expression in the Count's eye meant what she thought it meant, what would have been the result had she behaved otherwise than she had done. Did she regret her "curst ways?" What might the life of a French comtesse be? She quite agreed with Tottie, that foreign titles were inferior articles to English ones; she also believed that she looked down on men of every other nation than her own. The French, she allowed, were the next best: there was no denying

they were brave. She ended by saying to herself that all speculations about M. de Jençay, and as to what might have been had this and that been different, were a waste of time, and she turned again to her novel.

All at once she threw the book on the floor, so startling May that her "forget-me-not" became a mere blotch of cobalt.

"I beg pardon, dear May, but why will people write such trash about love and babies? I detest babies in novels. Why can't writers do as Miss Austen did? One can read all her books without being ashamed. Her heroes ask her heroines to marry them in a reasonable way—no humbug about dying for love."

"You forget your enthusiasm about *Elaine*," returned May.

"Yes, but that's poetry; and it all happened in the fabulous ages, when there were giants and no stockbrokers in the land; but you'll allow that I always said if I had been Enid, I would have galloped away from that wretch of a husband of hers. And Marianna, I don't wonder she was left to herself. I don't believe in that sort of pining."

Cattie was quite unnecessarily forcible on the subject.

Miss Sinclair here came in with the cheerful air and manner which had been hers before the Count's visit.

"What pleasant news have you to give?" asked Cattie, aggressively.

Miss Sinclair did not reply immediately. She sat down to her own peculiar table, opened her tiny work-basket, which somehow, however, contained all the necessary implements for work, took up the stitch of her crochet lace, and then said,—"It's such a relief to have the house to oneself."

May resumed her painting, and Cattie her book, and not another word was spoken by any of the three until the luncheon bell rung. Miss Sinclair had the drawing-room all to herself that afternoon. She was so satisfied that some peril had been averted, that she bore her isolation with the perfect equanimity which excellent people evince under the trials of their neighbours.

At lunch Tottie declared that the house was like a tomb, and wondered where the Count was. At dinner the same young lady propounded the

question to her father, whether they were ever likely to see the Count again.

"Possibly; we generally do meet people over and over again," was the answer.

In the evening Mr. Sinclair observed that it was time to make preparations for their annual trip to the sea-side. Where should they go? To Broughty Ferry, or to St. Andrews?"

"Oh! dear Dar, let us go to Skye," said Cattie.

"A capital thought," returned Mr. Sinclair; "it will tighten up our nerves to get rid of civilized society for a time."

"It will be very inconvenient, sir," remonstrated Bessie. "We shall have to depend on the steamers for meat and poultry and vegetables."

"We shall be able to get oatcakes and gulls' eggs if we are hard driven for food," said Cattie.

"I have a great dislike to trying experiments," said Miss Sinclair. "I have always remarked that those who are the first to run the risk of disagreeables, are the most discontented when they arrive."

"Why did you put Skye in our heads, Cattie?" said Mr. Sinclair. "If we go, you must under-

take to bear the brunt of the ill-humour of the whole party."

"I shall do whatever you desire me to do," said Cattie.

"Then get a Bradshaw and find out the route for us."

It was settled that they were to go to Skye. Mrs. Johnson of course came to wish them good-bye, and of course was inquisitive as to the Count's last words: what had he said and done when he took leave?

"Thanked papa, and shook hands with all of us," answered Miss Sinclair.

"As we are alone, my dear," went on Aunt Polly, "I may say I am astonished. He gave me the idea of thinking of one of you. However, I am not sorry that things are as they are. I have been hearing horrible stories about the French. Mrs. Fraser Lowsands told me her mother knew a Frenchman who afterwards poisoned his wife to marry another woman. Not at all a nice proceeding, as she said."

To Skye they went, and it all occurred as Miss Sinclair had predicted. It was supremely difficult

to provide for the daily wants of so large a party; and then no one was in spirits, or even sociable. Cattie took long solitary scrambling walks; sat on the sea-shore, listening to the sharp melancholy cry of sea-birds. She would sit for hours throwing stones into the sea. Could Bessie have read Cattie's thoughts during those solitary hours, she would have been less harsh in her judgment of her father's adopted child.

Cattie suffered in secret from Miss Sinclair's increasing coolness towards her. But where could she go? She had no friends. What could she do? If she exerted her talents in the way congenial to her tastes, she must pain and offend Mr. Sinclair, and voluntarily she would do neither. And she dared not go out as a governess. She was inwardly convinced that she could never succeed in that way, and yet to remain where she was; unwelcome if not an object of suspicion: it was very hard. A vague uneasiness weighed on her; she thrilled with sudden fears, and singular forebodings. "I wish I were good and yielding as May," she would think, as she sat flinging pebbles and listening to the sea-gulls' cry. "I wish I were

some one else. I wish I could get rid of that terrible longing: I scarcely know for what. I shall go tumbling about in space, and never find a resting-place."

Often she thought of de Jençay, of the look she had seen in his eyes after her foolish escapade. Did she regret his departure? Sometimes she fancied she did. Did she wish to see him again? That query was not so easy to answer. Even in the innermost recesses of her mind, it remained without a distinct reply. One day she came to the conclusion that she had no heart, and that what she wanted was a companion for her mind. Yes, that was it; intellectual life was her ideal; some one to reason with, to whom to pour out her thoughts; some one who would analyse and discuss all great subjects with her. Study was a refuge and a defence; Art, a hope—far above all other earthly enjoyments—the noblest use of life. Why did circumstances tie her wings?

May was no gayer than Cattie. She employed herself painting the shells and sea-weed Tottie brought her. Miss Toynbee devoted herself entirely to her pen. She enjoyed the change, and so did

Mr. Sinclair; they were the only ones who did so, for Uncle Dan was clearly moping.

One morning at breakfast, there was a transient excitement. Mr. Sinclair received a letter from the Count; the handwriting was unmistakeable: French and English handwriting differ as much as other French and English things. Mr. Sinclair read the letter through, then threw it across the table to Bessie. She read it in her turn, refolded it, and returned it in silence to her father. Provoking Bessie!

But Mr. Sinclair liked no mysteries in his home, and he said, laying it before Cattie, "You and May, and Miss Toynbee above all, ought to have the benefit of such neatly-turned compliments, as much addressed to you all as to me."

De Jençay wrote a pleasant, lively letter, describing first the sporting life at B—— Lodge, and attributing the attention shown to him as the result of friendship for Mr. Sinclair. The only drawback was the absence of that delightful female society which was the charm of Mayfield. There followed a request to present his *hommages respectueux à ces demoiselles*, and an assurance of most affectionate and distinguished regard for Mr. Sinclair. A P.S.

mentioned that the writer was returning to France in ten days.

"When you write, sir," said Miss Toynbee, "I beg you will offer M. de Jençay my kind remembrances. He is the only man I ever knew who reminded me of Sir Charles Grandison."

"The greatest bore ever made a hero of," said Cattie. "I mean Sir Charles Grandison," she added.

"I don't see any necessity for my writing," said Mr. Sinclair; "if I do, he will write again, and it will go on for ever. I had better let the correspondence die at once."

"Letter writing is only pleasant when there are interests in common," observed Bessie.

"Why do you hate the Count so much?" asked Tottie. "I am sure he never did any one any harm. He was as kind as kind could be, even to Cattie, who was always rude to him."

Cattie said, "You should not make wholesale accusations, Tottie;" and as she spoke a furious blush covered her face. She went out of the room with the comfortable conviction that everyone, even Uncle Dan, had remarked her change of colour.

Time goes on, as we all know, whether we are

dull or gay, hopeful or desponding, the measure of its pace is in ourselves. Mr. Sinclair's six weeks' holidays were over, and he must return to work. As they all stood together on the deck of the steamer taking them to Oban, he said, "Why shouldn't we take a trip to Norway next year?"

Next year! Fathers of girls never seem to anticipate any change in their family party. They see marriages taking place all round them, and they live without fear that the same accident or incident may happen to derange their course of existence. Whoever met a match-making father?

"By the Lord Harry, here's the Count turned up again!" exclaimed Mr. Sinclair, as he looked over his letters on arriving at Mayfield. "Postmark shows he is in France." He read all his other correspondence first before he opened de Jençay's letter. There were two enclosures, he read a few lines from one, then slipped it back into the envelope without any remark; even Miss Sinclair felt curious.

"What do you think it's about?" asked Tottie, when Mr. Sinclair had left the room.

"Business, which does not concern us," said Miss Sinclair; but she was not frank in saying so.

By and bye Beatson appeared to beg Miss Leighton to go to the library.

"Goodness gracious me!" cried Tottie, her eyes almost out of her head.

Cattie found Mr. Sinclair pacing up and down the library, looking very grave.

"Sit down, my dear;" and he placed her in his own arm-chair close by the fire. He felt that her hands were cold as ice.

He now heightened, now lowered the gas. At last he sat down by Cattie, and said, "Probably you will not be so surprised by the letter I have received from M. de Jençay as I am."

Cattie was shaking from head to foot; she steadied herself by holding the arms of her chair. Had she been able to speak, she would have replied, No, she was not surprised; she had felt sure it would come; it had been revealed to her, how she could not explain.

Mr. Sinclair went on: "One of my letters is from the Count's mother. Acting in accordance with the customs of her country, she writes to me asking you in marriage for her son. He has also written; both letters are couched in the handsomest

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Mr. Sinclair went on: "One of my letters is from the Count's mother. Acting in accordance with the customs of her country, she writes to me asking you in marriage for her son. He has also written; both letters are couched in the handsomest

terms. It seems that the Count conceived a serious attachment for you during his visit here."

"He has been in no hurry to make it known," said Cattie, in a husky tone of voice.

"I do not think the worse of him for that; it was right to take time for reflection. Marriage is a serious affair, Cattie; and a man of two and thirty considers it such. Besides, de Jençay meets your reproach by saying, his delay was occasioned by his mother's absence from La Gonesse, and he had her consent to obtain before he could explain his sentiments. Another national custom, and a praiseworthy one."

"Do they know that I am penniless?"

"I understand from both letters that they look for no fortune."

"How does he know I have none?"

"Why meet a proposal that honours you in so captious a spirit? Read what Madame de Jençay and her son write, and judge for yourself of the spirit in which they wrote."

Cattie took the letters. "Must I give an answer at once?"

"Not at all," he said, eagerly. "Take time

for reflection, Cattie; and remember that as long as I live you have a home and a father."

Cattie ran out of the room upstairs, and locking her door, threw herself on her bed in a convulsion of tears. "He wants to be rid of me."

She had not marked the emphasis he put on the words, "As long as I live you have a home."

Cattie's fate had lately been weighing on Mr. Sinclair's mind. He was aware of the discomfort gaining ground in his household. That the poor girl had been a bone of contention with outside connections had not much troubled him, but when dissension took her place by his own hearth, the cause of it became a serious anxiety. Could he have rendered this child of adoption independent, the cure of the evil would have been in his power. But neither during his life nor at his death did he consider that he had a right to lessen the moderate portions of his daughters. Sooner or later, Cattie's high spirit would take the alarm, and he shrunk more than ever from one who was as a daughter to him, going out into the world to gain her daily bread. He knew how she would do this, and thought with horror of the temptations that would

assail her. Just as these considerations were pressing more and more heavily on him, came this proposal of marriage, offering every advantage of fortune and rank, placing Cattie at once in the situation most suited to her tastes.

True, he should disapprove of one of his daughters marrying a Roman Catholic; but Cattie was not his daughter—not a Presbyterian; and with all his goodness and tolerance, Mr. Sinclair looked upon Episcopalians as pretty much on a par with Papists. If she could love M. de Jençay, it really would be a most happy issue from the dilemma of her situation. She would have all of which she now had nothing—family, fortune, position.

"God forgive me if I err in wishing this!" he exclaimed, as she left him.

"Where's Cattie?" said Mr. Sinclair, when he went back to the drawing-room.

"I thought she was with you," answered Bessie.

At tea-time, Tottie was sent to call Cattie. Without opening the door, Cattie answered that she would be down directly.

She bathed her face, and went to the drawing-

room, intending to show herself calm and collected; but the moment she saw the familiar forms gathered in a cheery circle round the table, then she shivered from head to foot. "I am turned out," passed through her mind.

Bessie it was who said, "Tottie, go and fetch a shawl;" and Bessie it was who wrapped it round Cattie's shoulders. What was the moving spring of Bessie's unwonted kindness? Did any one ever pain another, and keep his own soul untroubled? Cattie feeling Bessie's arms round her, looked up with pathetic eyes, and said, "Kiss me." And Bessie did so. That tender action of Bessie's, and her kiss, decided Cattie's destiny. She said in her heart, "Dear old propriety, I will make you happy." Then she took up the book nearest to her, and shaded her face with her hand. She had no idea that it was the German grammar she was pretending to read.

Uncle Dan watched May eagerly. There was nothing strange in her proceedings. She remembered, as usual, who took cream and who did not, and the number of lumps to put into the several cups; and afterwards played chess with him. Even Tottie was glad when bedtime came.

Next morning, Beatson the demure carried a note from Miss Leighton to Mr. Sinclair. It contained only these lines:—

"DEAR MR. SINCLAIR,—

"Please to write and say I accept M. de Jençay's offer.

"Your grateful orphan,

"CATTIE."

After sending this note, she went to Miss Sinclair's room.

"I have come to tell you that I have accepted M. de Jençay. Don't wish me joy. It's too stupid to congratulate a girl because she has decided to tie herself to a man who may make her wretched. How pleased your aunt Johnson will be. She'll think of the 'nice proceeding' of the Frenchman who poisoned his wife. Tell May and the rest, will you?"

Away ran Cattie. Going downstairs she met Uncle Dan.

"Are you not breaking your heart?" she asked.

"About what?" And his tone was that of alarm.

"Why, you are soon to lose me; the whetstone for your satire, the target for your arrows of scorn."

On she went. The next person she came upon was Miss Toynbee.

"Guess what's the next absurd thing I am going to do? I am going to marry and be married."

"And to my Sir Charles Grandison!" exclaimed the good T. rapturously.

"If you say a word in his praise or about my happiness, I won't have him. The letter is not gone yet."

It was an understood thing that the subject was not to be discussed.

Little by little, however, a change came over Cattie's mood. Of all observers of the phases of an engagement, a young girl of fifteen or sixteen is the one who draws the most ingenious conclusions from what escapes her elders.

"Cattie has not asked Miss Toynbee to help her with her letter to the Count to-day," said Tottie; "and she did when she answered the two first."

It was Tottie who made it known to the others that Cattie knew the days when her French letters would arrive, and was always down very early on that morning, and Tottie knew that Cattie carried them about in her pocket.

"She's not so cankered as she was. She won't say so; but I am sure she is desperate fond of her Count."

"Don't be so coarse," said Miss Sinclair; "it's very wrong to be occupying your mind with such things."

"Why more wrong for me than for the rest of you. Besides, it is quite right to love the person you marry; and I hope I shall be married before I am twenty; that I do."

Every one in the house, even to the boy who cleaned the boots, was taken up about the engagement. The greatest interest was shown in carrying the letters to Miss Leighton. Even Beatson went about with furtive smiles. As Mrs. Johnson said,—"The reproach (meaning single blessedness) was taken from the house, and one marriage makes many," concluded Aunt Polly, joyfully.

"A nobleman be a nobleman, whether he be

a furrin or a home one; and Miss Cattie will have to be called 'My lady' when she comes to visit us." That was what Beatson said; and they all rejoiced over the glory that had fallen on the family they were in.

CHAPTER VI.

"CHANGING OLD LAMPS FOR NEW."

Miss Leighton had been transformed into Madame la Comtesse Armand de Jençay. Weddings, as a rule, are great trials to all concerned in them. Let us be satisfied with a very few particulars about this one. Everything was conducted with the greatest propriety. Aunt Polly, who was present on the occasion, and with a radiant face, you may be sure, was never tired of describing how well Bessie had managed, "though, poor thing, she had had no experience of such doings." Another topic of unfailing interest with the good lady was the bridegroom's behaviour. "He had brought his cousin the Prince, and the Duke his godfather with him; and yet he was not a bit cold nor upsetting. Most delightful! And when he put the ring on her finger, he laid his hand on hers so tenderly, it brought the

tears to my eyes." Aunt Polly's description always had the same effect on her.

Felicitations and presents had flowed in in an almost unceasing stream during the last week. Astonishing to Cattie herself how many friends she had; and then, what was she to do with all those carriage-bags and handkerchief sachets, &c.

Another question puzzled Aunt Polly and others. Was the bride to be called Comtesse (it was comical to hear the nasal sounds supposed to be the right thing) or Countess?

"Countess," decided Miss Toynbee. "People say Baroness Rothschild in England."

May and Tottie were the bridesmaids. The last drew off the bride's glove, for May trembled so much she could not.

Cattie had begged not to be present at the breakfast. She said she could not stand being speechified about, and having her health drank. Her pale face showed that she was not fit for what she called "the festive scene." She was Cattie to the last, keeping down all that was tender and loveable in herself. As the carriage drove off, Mr. Sinclair, returning to the drawing-room, said,—

"Now, aunt Polly, not a word about marriages for the next ten years."

Uncle Dan was the only absentee of the family. He had gone away some days before; but he and Cattie had shaken hands amicably.

The Count and Countess had gone to Rome. When De Jençay reminded Cattie of her wish to visit Italy, she answered,—

"Circumstances brought me. My theory is proved. Do you yield?" Of course he did.

The bride wrote home, as she still continued to call Mayfield, in raptures with all she was seeing and doing. She was beginning to speak Italian with facility. She was taking lessons in oils from one of the first artists of the French School. She had also a great singing-master. She wrote of rides in the Campagna, of blue horizons, purple domes, of buffaloes, of arches, columns, the Pope and the cardinals, her mother-in-law's good friends, and of the Easter ceremonies.

"How thoroughly happy she seems," said Miss Toynbee.

"She says precious little of him who gives her all these pleasures," said uncle Dan.

"Her happiness is the best proof of their being comfortable together," said Mr. Sinclair.

And now we must take leave of Mayfield. Goëthe says something to this effect, that "Absence does not blot out our friends—it only makes their lines fainter." Mayfield and its inmates were always dear to Cattie's heart; but they no longer formed part of her daily life. We shall hear of them, perhaps see them, occasionally; but it is Cattie's history that is to be told.

To the west, it was all amber and purple; in the east, rosy clouds flecked the delicate opal hues of the sky. Birds were singing, flowers scenting the air, the earth seemed decked for a fête, as Monsieur and Madame de Jençay came in sight of the Château de la Gonesse. The two sharp-pointed turrets, and the steep grey roof had been visible for some time—almost ever since they had left the railway terminus at St. Blaize. Round a sharp corner, up a trying bit of hill, and then the spirited little black horses dashed under an archway into a large court. Facing the archway was the Château, and opposite to that again were the stables and other outbuildings.

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About the whole there was an unmistakable air of antiquity.

A diminutive female figure, dressed in some dark material, her skirt very short, showing a pair of small thick leather boots, a black satin cape on her shoulders, a capôte on her head, was standing on the perron.

"My mother," said the Count.

"Good heavens! What a specimen of the old noblesse," thought Cattie.

The little old lady ran nimbly down the flight of steps, and herself opened the carriage-door. A pair of the brightest and most laughing blue eyes looked eagerly at Cattie.

"Vite, ma belle, que je vous embrasse," and the Dowager stood on tiptoes and kissed her son's wife.

They went up the steps into a broad corridor, which traversed the house, a glass door opposite the front door giving egress into the flower-garden.

"There, there—we won't stop to look at anything. Come to the salon. I am dying to see you without your bonnet," continued the vivacious lady.

They went up a wide stone staircase, with quaintly carved balustrades, passed through a similar corridor to the one below, and then into the drawing-room.

Cattie could not restrain an exclamation of delight.

"Oh! what a pretty room."

"Never mind the room. I want to see your face."

Cattie took off her bonnet, and stood blushing and smiling to be looked at.

"I am satisfied," said the Dowager. "Armand did not tell me a fib."

"Does he ever?"

"Men all do, when they talk to or of women. Dieu! how I have heard them deny that they thought a woman handsome to their wives. I never believe a word they say, unless my own eyes or ears back them up. I did not give Armand credit for such good taste. I never considered him particular in his admirations. I shall adore you."

What a speech to make to a three months' wife, and that wife Cattie!

A sigh made both ladies turn round.

"Ah!" went on the Dowager. "I forgot to present my niece to you, Mdlle. de Kerouanne."

Yolande de Kerouanne came forward: an immense woman; she was tall as a Cent Garde, and

with shoulders to match; black-haired, black-eyed, brown-skinned, and with a famous moustache. Add to this a loud clear voice. Madame her aunt had nicknamed her "la Géante."

"Don't be frightened," said the Dowager. "She is as harmless as a dove."

"No; no one could be afraid of Yolande who had once looked into her eyes. They were as pure and innocent as those of a little child, with the honest fond look of some great stupid spaniel.

"Isn't she delightful, Yolande?"

"Perfectly," returned Yolande, with an emphasis that was touching and absurd.

"She means what she says," continued the old lady, glancing up at the great tall woman patronizingly. "I never caught our Géante saying what she did not mean, though she has lived all her life with *me*. However, to-day we are both of one mind. And now let me show you your apartment."

Opening a door at the further end of the corridor, she ushered her daughter-in-law into a spacious room, with windows looking over the flower-garden into what in England we should call the home park, and through which a bustling little river cut its way.

"I have prepared this for you," said the old lady; "but you can make your own choice, for I am only going to stay here long enough to introduce you to the right people. I cannot trust Armand. He would launch you into the bourgeois set. Don't let him. I was terrified he would marry into it."

"But I am not noble," said Cattie, flushing, and drawing herself up in a stately way that would have become a queen.

"No; but you are a foreigner, ma belle, and have no relations. Do you see the difference?"

Cattie did not at all approve of this reason for waiving objections to her; but the Dowager intimidated her. Emerson's explanation of this unwonted sensation in the young Countess would be that the Dowager, having the more powerful pulse and the better digestion, must, therefore, infallibly govern the other.

"Must you go?" asked Cattie, to cover her discomfiture.

"Thank you, my dear little one. You are amiable, but not sincere. You would not wish me to stay; and you are right. We are as different inside as outside. You are fashioned for to-day, and

I for yesterday. Besides, travelling keeps us young. When I am in some strange place, all new around me, I forget my years. My going is settled. I tell you so at once, that we may spend a few days happily together. Armand's marriage gives me my freedom. Now then, I leave you to rest;" and the Dowager, kissing Cattie's cheek, tripped away like a girl of sixteen.

In the evening, Cattie must sing. Armand had told her that his mother was a judge of music, and also an epicure. She must have the best or none. The young wife saw that he was anxious as to the effect of her singing by the way he asked her if she thought she could manage the finale of the *Sonnambula*, or "Regnava qual silenzio."

"I shall not be able to sing anything if you talk so much about it. I am beginning to feel quite fractious."

The husband-lover did as so many of them do when they try to soothe a woman out of humour, she can scarcely tell why. Cattie did not, in consequence, look half so pretty when she went down to dinner as on arriving. But her mother-in-law was so vivacious, and told so many good stories,

that she soon brought back the young Countess's smiles.

"Armand made you cross before dinner," whispered the Dowager. "I saw it in your face. Avoid têtes-à-têtes with your husband. They are perilous between married people. What can they have to say to one another, except about money? Now go to sleep on the sofa for half-an-hour, and then you shall wake up and sing to me. I love music," concluded the speaker, as if she loved nothing else.

"Open the piano and light the candles," said the old lady, as her son came into the salon.

Cattie sat down to the piano, and away rushed her firm little fingers from bass to treble and back, her diamond rings flashing to the sound. The mother-in-law settled herself in her arm-chair like one satisfied.

Cattie divined what would be best to sing. She chose one of Gordigiani's popular airs: "O Santissima Vergine."

It looks so easy on the music-desk—not a trill, not a roulade—and yet what a triumph of art it may be made. What grace, what exquisite grace and artistic simplicity in the young Countess's rendering

of it, and the perfect pronunciation of each syllable. Even with a less wonderful voice such singing must have been a treat.

When the last note had died away the Dowager opened her eyes. She said only one word, "Delicious!" and then again buried herself in her chair, adding, "More, more, ma cherie."

Cattie sang, "Voi che sapete."

"Not another note to-night," exclaimed the elder Madame de Jençay: "not another; my whole soul is steeped in harmony. If anything could keep me here, it would be that delicious voice, that talent. But I must go; it would never do." She spoke as one does when speaking to oneself. Then to Cattie: "When you sing, I am sure you are cold in the back. I should have been glad to see you as well as hear you, but I dared only take one glance, for there, just as I expected, was that stupid Yolande, making a fool of herself as usual."

Cattie's looks of surprise made the Dowager add: "She cannot help herself, poor soul; but take my advice, whenever you are going to sing to any one, first send her out of the room. She would caricature an angel. If you raise your eyes, so will she; if you

round your elbows, so will she. If she goes to a play, we never dare to let her sit in the front of a box."

Yolande listened to all this quite unconcernedly; but when Countess Armand turned and smiled to her, the Géante's Juno eyes met Cattie's with a passionate look almost embarrassing.

"Shall I like this place? Will it ever feel like home? What two strange women! Are all French-women odd? I shall not be sorry when the old lady goes. She reminds me of uncle Dan. Her son, her only son, and yet she does not love him! Why?" These were some of the thoughts floating through Cattie's mind that evening.

Her spirits sunk. She had become accustomed to her set at Rome, almost all English, and she felt now for the first time that she had left her "own people."

Armand found her crying in her dressing-room. He knelt down before her, kissing her hands, imploring her to tell him what ailed her. He had for the last eight weeks been doing his very best to spoil her. Of all her numerous admirers he had been the chief, her most devoted slave. This adoration did not

much touch her. She let him adore her with a complacency that said plainly, "I hope you are satisfied."

The sharp Dowager said before she left:

"I admire these Englishwomen; their calm is incomparable. Here is this daughter of mine. Her husband comes or goes; she is equally placid. She sits serene as a goddess to be adored. Now our young wives, with their French impetuosity, make such a fuss; they are in fits if they lose sight of their husbands. Not those in Paris," she added, correcting herself. "My beauty," addressing Cattie, "you remind me of a glacier."

"In England I was accused of being too expansive, too warm."

"Madame Lafond cannot understand how you can let Armand out of your sight. When she married, she loudly wished that there had only been one chair in her house."

"Why?" asked Cattie.

"Why? Because then she and her husband must have always sat on the same chair."

Cattie put up her lip for all answer.

Let us return to the day after Count and Countess Armand's arrival at La Gonesse.

After the cup of early coffee, the husband and wife strolled out of door before the dew was off the flowers, of a thousand hues, that filled the garden with their perfume. The tops of a line of distant hills were touched by the golden light of the morning sun. The murmur of the awakening village, low, yet distinct, met their ears. Arm in arm they passed through the gate leading into the park.

"What a charming place for a croquet-ground!" exclaimed Cattie. "I suppose there are neighbours, are there not?"

"A good many at St. Blaize; but my mother visits only one or two families."

"But we are going to change all that. You are of the new school, you know, and I am un peu gamine," and Cattie looked archly at him; and he drew her arm further within his.

"You must order a mowing machine, like the one at Mayfield, and in a few weeks this grass will be perfect for playing. I am sure croquet parties would be popular directly."

"You will have to teach the game."

"That's easily done. I shall take two or three

in hand, and then they can teach two or three more. It's such an easy way of entertaining."

"I am afraid the Préfet, and the Maire, and the Conservateur des Forêts can't be turned into croquet players."

"Don't throw cold water on my plans, or I shall begin to hate the place at once."

"No, no. You must learn to love the old house."

"Then the first thing to do is to get the mowing machine."

While thus talking they had been going up a rising ground. Arrived at the summit he bid her look around. Far, far to right and left, on towards the blue mountains hemming in the valley, now bathed in sunshine, the land called him lord. Marked by that great mass of chestnuts was the site of the Château de Jençay, destroyed in the great revolution, only a yard of wall and some heaps of rubbish remaining to show where the great pile of building had stood.

"La Gonesse," explained the Count, "had formerly been the residence of some cadet of the family."

"It has a delightful old look. I shall send a

sketch of it to Mayfield, and if I can only find two or three pleasant families, with plenty of young people, I shall be sure to like it—at least during the summer months. It must be dismal in winter."

"I never found it so."

"Oh! but you promised I should go to Paris always at Christmas."

"If you wish it, certainly. You must try and be happy, Cattie," he said, with a little sigh.

"I think I shall manage it, as long as you are so good-natured. Do you know what I like best in the world?" and she clasped his arm with her two hands, and looked into his face with one of her enchanting smiles.

"What, ma cherie?"

"My own way—always my own way; give me that, I ask for nothing more, and I shall be happy."

"Then be happy," and he stooped and kissed her rosy lips. She let him do it, and that was all. She was not only a pretty woman, she was something more; she was very attractive; perhaps, indeed, it was more manner, voice, and a certain artistic grace —half natural, half acquired—which brought her so much admiration. She had entered completely into

the heart of her husband; nothing would ever uproot her hold. He had wooed and won her, believing she would give him what he had never known—a home. So clever, so gifted, she would surely not find pleasure in frivolous amusements. Besides, and above all, he believed that she had given him her heart as a free gift; and, to a generous nature, this was one of the strongest claims on his affections.

After the midday breakfast, the Dowager promenaded her daughter-in-law up and down the corridors, telling her the names of each of the portraits.

"This lady with the high-powdered head, bold eyes, double chin, and fully-displayed bust, was a Noailles; the thin dark man opposite was her husband."

"He is like Armand," said Cattie.

"Yes, they have both long noses. The chronicles of those days say she used him as a mere 'porte respect.'"

A de Rohan had a rose in her stomacher, and an apple in her hand; a beauty of the reign of Louis XV. "That's her husband," said the Dowager, pointing to a half-length of a man in a periwig and flowered waistcoat, with a false air of a shepherd about him.

There was a de Coigny, and a Montmorency, and one or two of lesser note.

"These half-dozen are all that are left us," continued the old lady; "the rest were burned by those brigands whom your husband considers the saviours and benefactors of France. You English are a strong great nation, because you know how to value and respect your aristocracy."

"The English aristocracy know how to respect the rights of all the other classes," began Armand.

"Ah! well. I have heard your arguments on the subject a thousand times, and they have failed to convince, mon fils," interrupted the Dowager.

Among other marks of her belonging to the old régime, Madame chose to pronounce the word "fils" without sounding the s.

Armand said no more.

Cattie, with all her British disdain of foreigners, had her vanity agreeably tickled by finding she now belonged to a family allied to all the greatest names of France. Her mother-in-law was niece to a princess the grandmother of a reigning king, and goddaughter of an Austrian archduchess. She felt herself just then a lucky woman. A coronet of real metal, so

coveted for her by her poor mother, was on her head. She had, in fact, gained the rich prizes of the world, through the love of a good man. Yes, Armand was good; and it would be her own fault if she were not a happy woman. Unfortunately, Armand had made such a divinity of her that she had got the notion he was her inferior in talent. She considered herself the cleverer of the two, and with women of Cattie's stamp, in order to have their love, it is necessary they should be convinced of a man's intellectual superiority. Madame Armand deified talent; high culture was sure to sway her. She overlooked the force of character altogether; did not know, poor inexperienced girl, that it is energy, perseverance, large-heartedness, which must rule the world, and not the being either a first-rate artist or a first-rate scholar. She had yet to learn that the moral qualities are the governing ones. With all her real gifts and higher pretensions, she had not escaped the inheritance of some of her mother's silliness. Antecedents always do exert their sway in our lives. Grandparents and parents help to shape out the fate of their descendants. Yesterday brings forth to-morrow.

In the afternoon they walked down to the village.

All the folks turned out to have a look of the new "Comtesse." The men were a hardy set of fellows, the women as a rule were ugly, in spite of bright eyes. Scarcely one over thirty had a front tooth remaining. So general was the want, you might have supposed it a national fashion; their foreheads, too, were furrowed like those of Rembrandt's old women.

The cottages were not so clean as those of an English village, nor had they trim gardens; but there were flowers in most windows. Cocks and hens, and white-haired, dark-skinned children were everywhere; pigeons, so tame that you almost stepped on them before they would move, hopped about side by side with dangerous yellow-haired dogs. It happened to be dry, but you could see where puddles had been, and would be again, close up to the house doors.

When the young Countess drew a comparison not to the advantage of France, the Dowager exclaimed,—

"I am glad to hear you say this. Mon fils pretends that what he calls the emancipation of the peasant, and their being all the proprietors of a

morsel (the breadth of your bonnet-string) of the soil, is a benefit—a safeguard."

"Yes; men who have a share in a concern do their best to keep that concern safe," said Armand.

"Ta-ta-ta! You and your like have let loose the demon of democracy; it is wandering up and down Europe, and one of these days Jacques and Martin will come and tell you they have a better right to your land than you have, and if you don't agree . . . Well, well, please God I may be safe in any other purgatory than France will then be!"

"For one man to possess all, and another nothing cannot be justified."

"Vous êtes un ane, mon fil (fils)," and the old blue eyes sparkled ferociously for an instant.

Mdlle. de Kerouanne luckily at this instant came out of one of the cottages.

"I have been seeing old Aglaë. She wants to see my cousin's wife." Turning to Cattie, she added, "Aglaë remembers the burning of the great castle, and all about those times. You must not be afraid of her."

"I am not easily frightened," said Cattie, with a significant smile to her husband.

"But *she* is terrible," whispered the giantess.

"Then I must see her," said Cattie.

They all went into the cottage, and Cattie went up and offered her hand to the old woman.

Standing by one another what a contrast they presented. It was a painful one. How realize that the snowy elegant throat of the one could ever become that hideous roll of skin and bone and tendons of the other?

"This is the young Countess," said Yolande to Aglaë, who was standing leaning on two strong sticks.

"Where's the beautiful lady you told me about? I don't see her," she wheezed out.

"Don't be naughty," warned Yolande, "or I'll not send you white bread to-morrow."

"Hu, hu! so this is the German Jewwoman?" —here an oath. "I have no bed to lie on, madame; nothing but rags. Send me one."

"You have a good bed, you old storyteller," said Yolande.

"Not so white and soft as hers. I saw the burning, young citizen. Very good. My three sons, little, but devils, helped. Will you send me a good soft bed?"—this request always in a whining tone.

"And so you don't pray to the Virgin?"—here another oath—"you'll burn! I have seen the fire."

Aglaë crossed herself, and muttered something that sounded like a prayer.

"Come away," said Armand, taking his wife's arm.

"I will send you a bed," said Cattie, "if you promise never to call me a German Jew again."

"A good bed; soft as yours?—eh?" and here such a frightful expression, which Cattie did not understand, that Armand hurried her out. The old woman spit after them; but the cry "A good bed, a soft bed," was heard in the road.

"I had no idea there was yet in France such a strong prejudice against Protestants," said Cattie, looking quite pale.

"A relic of the old days my mother so lauds. Let me warn you against always agreeing to what Yolande proposes. She is as good as bread, and a real Providence to the poor, but she blunders horribly."

"Does she always live here?"

"Yes—that is, she always has lived here since the death of her father and mother." He added after a little pause, "I hope you won't find her in the way;

she has no pretensions of any kind, I may say she is every one's servant—and my mother counts on her remaining with us."

Her own forlorn situation when Mr. Sinclair took her to his home came back to Cattie's memory, and made her say with warmth, " If my wishes have anything to do with her going or staying, I wish her to stay. I know what it is to be thrown loose on the world."

" Thank you, my best: what a happiness for a man to have a wife like you."

" Blindness I see is a blessing sometimes," said Cattie.

" I never wish to see better than at this instant," was the answer; " you are adorable."

" And you—absurd." So saying she let go his arm and ran back to the side of her mother-in-law.

Countess Armand smiled so pleasantly all that evening to Yolande, sitting on a footstool at the giantess's knees, admiring the fancy work those Brobdingnag fingers were busy with, that from a worshipper, Yolande became a bond-slave—Cattie's slave for good or for evil, as Cattie should choose. True friend—yet false friend, if to guide to the

right and warn from the wrong be the test of friendship.

It would take many pages to describe Yolande's strange loves and self-martyrdoms. Once, when she was yet a mere girl, she had adored (for her attachments were always adorations) a creature not worthy to kiss her shoe-tie. She found out his fancy for her demoiselle de compagnie, a pretty little empty-headed creature. The man was thought to be consumptive; and Yolande would walk a league in the coldest morning of winter to get asses' milk, and then make Mademoiselle Julie offer it as though she had fetched it. Yolande was rich, though Armand de Jençay had forgotten to say so to Cattie, and Yolande had given a *dot* to her rival, and thanked God she could make the man she loved happy in his own way.

The Dowager had tried more than once to marry her niece, but Yolande was romantic and wanted to be married for love. Her aunt made a butt of her; but she liked her as well as she could like any woman.

Children and animals were fond of la Géante; she was the physician and nurse of all the ailing babies, chickens and puppies in La Gonesse. The only

bad propensity discoverable in that big woman was in her conduct to flowers. No sooner did she see them growing luxuriantly, than she attacked them—they must be decimated, or rather doubly decimated, that, as she explained, a small remnant might flourish. The gardeners complained in vain, and in vain the Dowager remonstrated—Armand pleaded, Yolande promised, but the passion for extermination was too strong; and her ruthless rootings-up and cuttings-down went on, whenever the opportunity offered.

CHAPTER VII.

A LEGITIMIST DOWAGER.

THE next day Count and Countess Armand were to accompany the Dowager in a round of calls: the custom being in France that the last comer makes the first visit. On going the next morning into the bright little breakfast room, papered with fabulous birds flying among equally fabulous trees, Cattie found the old lady in earnest converse with a short, stout, high-coloured young man, dressed in a priest's soutane.

"Monsieur le Curé, my dear."

Cattie had a nervous dread that he would say—"Ugh, ugh! you heretic!" but Monsieur le Curé made her a low bow, glancing shyly at her, his cheeks flaming redder as he did so, and his large ears seeming to grow larger and more purple every

moment. "Madame Armand," as she was getting accustomed to hear herself called, was not yet at her ease in receiving people without a hand-shaking, so she made a droll little bow and sat down hastily. The Curé cleared his throat and took out his brown checked pocket-handkerchief and made a solemn trumpet-like sound in it, his black eyes looking at the new lady of the château over the friendly protection of the calico. Discovering that she was as much embarrassed as himself, he ventured on offering her a welcome, and to ask questions which could at that moment have but one allowable answer. Did she like the country? and was not the château magnificent?

Jolly little curé, poor as Goldsmith's parish priest, and yet with always something to bestow on those who asked.

When Armand came in he welcomed the visitor warmly, saying: "I must put my wife under your protection; old Aglaë was very rude to her last evening. You must make the people understand that Protestants are placed by the Emperor on the same footing as Roman Catholics."

The Curé got purpler than ever, his eyes glowed

like live coals. "They are so many pigs, Monsieur le Comte; I will frighten them, I will frighten them; I will tell them M. le Comte will not employ any of them."

"No, no," said Cattie, "pray do not punish them only for showing they believe what they have been taught. I hope they will find out in time that I am a Christian, though not worshipping in all ways as they do."

"Madame la Comtesse is as good as she is wise," returned the Curé, who thought she was the very image of the Ste. Catherine in his church. Nowhere before had he seen that bright soft hair, except in that painting.

The Curé and the Dowager had a long tête-à-tête after breakfast was over, and it was then that Cattie asked her husband where she was to go to church, "For if I go with you," she added, "it will be supposed I am of no religion."

"There is a Protestant temple in St Blaize, the pastor of which bears a high character; I will show it you to-day: it is quite within a drive."

At three o'clock the Dowager, and Monsieur and Madame Armand, set off in the landau with four

horses, *à la* Daumont, postillions in maroon velvet jackets with silver bindings and tassels, two men seated behind with great coats symmetrically folded, and hanging over the back of the rumble. The village children, and the village dogs, rushed out to see the grand folks go by, the postillions restraining their horses to a dignified trot.

Cattie, it must be confessed, enjoyed the grandeur of her position ; it was, indeed, the realization of many a waking dream. She smiled graciously on her admiring husband. As he sat before her, sunning himself in her eyes, he looked ten years younger than he had done when he arrived at Mayfield. His mother watched him with a half-sarcastic, half-sad expression on her face. "What a witch nature is!" she ejaculated, half aloud.

Cattie turned round, "Nothing, my dear; I was merely speculating as to the properties and effects of matter. Men are all born materialists."

"We are bad enough, but not so bad as you make us out, mother," said Armand, with a good deal of pleading in his look. Why should she, his own mother, throw a shade on this happy hour. He had early in his marriage come to doubt the truth of

the words Uncle Dan had taken care he should overhear, but by that time, he had come to love his wife with all his large heart; he felt that she could make his happiness, if she would, and Love himself was teaching him how to win his cause. He shrunk more than ever from any of the Dowager's coarse definitions.

She either did not see or did not choose to heed her son's mute appeal.

"Pascal defines man as neither angel nor beast; for my part, I have always found even the finest gentleman with more of the latter than the former in his composition, and if you want to rule them, women must remember that."

The smiles faded out of Cattie's eyes, and her voice was cold, even stern, as she said: "I, at all events, shall never try any other persuasions than those of reason."

"Then I promise you, that you will never succeed;—but here we are at the Préfecture."

Though the Préfet was not himself noble, madame, his wife, had been a Mademoiselle de Belleville. Those two little letters "de" preserved Madame Lionard née *de* Belleville from being over-

looked by madame de Jençay, née half a hundred times a *de*.

It happened to be one of the reception days at the Préfecture, when every one who was not a retail shopkeeper had a right to present themselves in that yellow damask salon, with a hideous full-length of the Emperor on one side of the folding-doors, and a still more excruciating likeness of the Empress on the other.

Madame Lionard, on these open days, took her seat on the yellow damask sofa, near the chimney-piece, at one o'clock of the afternoon. The room, with that stiff, unsocial look which belongs to official rooms, was more than half full when the de Jençays entered. It had been supposed possible that the new Countess might come, and the ladies of the town mustered strong, in the hope of gratifying their curiosity.

Madame Lionard, a thin dark-skinned woman, dressed in a dazzlingly white embroidered muslin, came forward half the breadth of the room to meet the "La Gonesse family," as they were usually called in St. Blaize. Madame Lionard was a plain woman, decidedly plain; but she appeared uncon-

scious of so disagreeable a fact. She dressed just as the prettiest women did, and made you soon forget that she was not pretty.

There never could be any dearth of conversation where the old Comtesse de Jençay was. She introduced her daughter-in-law, and laughed and talked as if no one had been present but herself and Madame Lionard. She really thought nothing about the other visitors, and showed that she did not. She did not stare, nor whisper. One might almost describe her manner as politely rude. Cattie wondered how the ladies could sit on so unmoved; but they had an end in view. They were mastering every feature of Cattie's countenance, and every detail of her dress. They bottled up their wrath against that stupid Madame Lionard, who ought to know that the sofa she sat on, and every table and chair in the room was bought with the money of their husbands, sons, and brothers. The Préfecture, and all in it, was more theirs by right than hers.

At last, having satisfied their curiosity, the neglected dames rose, curtsied. Madame Lionard rose, curtsied, took some steps in the direction of

the folding-doors, and then returned to her corner of the sofa.

"Who are they?" asked the Dowager.

"They are excellent persons," replied the Préfet's wife evasively and prudently. "But oh, mon Dieu! they expect me to find them in conversation as well as in balls."

Rumour said that the Lionards provided the one as little as the former.

Then Madame Lionard turned to talk to Cattie.

"Had Madame Armand ever been in France before? How well she spoke French—with an accent certainly; but not that dreadful British accent—a pretty way quite her own. Madame de Jençay had spoken of her musical talents—how Madame Lionard regretted the great salon was so bad for music. It was just as if one were singing into a feather-bed. Would she like to see what a préfecture was? All the hideous furniture belonged to it. Didn't it seem as if those two great pictures were about to fall and crush you? And such a hole for a public building."

And so they proceeded from room to room, always

finding fault with what seemed to Cattie very pretty and comfortable.

"She can bear no place but Paris," whispered the Dowager; "and this is only a third-class préfecture."

M. le Préfet came to satisfy his curiosity about Madame Armand de Jençay. By the law of contrast, he ought to have been fat—the law of sympathy made him as thin as Madame, as courtly mannered, prosy, and addicted to explanatory speeches.

Monsieur and Madame were always spoken of as a model couple. Excellent *ménage*—nothing, so gossip said, pleased the Préfet so well as when Madame interrupted him in his duties. They called one another "*bon ami*," and "*bonne amie*," often lapsed into the affectionate *tu* and *toi*, and when separated wrote sixteen pages a day to one another. It is a fact—and now who can say that French marriages do not turn out well?

"Sans adieu," said Madame Lionard, accompanying the de Jençays, not only quite to the door, but quite to the end of the long corridor leading to the great staircase. The Préfet himself put the ladies into their carriage.

Armand now gave orders where next they should drive. "Having been to the préfecture," he said, "we must leave cards on all the other functionaries."

"You need not know them for all that," said his mother, turning to Cattie. "I don't, and never will."

A whole packet of cards were left on the Judges, the Treasurer-General, the Procureur-Imperial, the heads of all possible offices, on inspectors and directors of every possible department—in short, not one of that army of officials, the strength of the Government, the weakness of the budget, were overlooked.

"I wash my hands of all this," said the Dowager; "the consequences be on your head Armand. The next thing I shall hear is that you are Mayor of your village."

"And why not? The nation has chosen its chief, and it's my faith that the nation has a right to choose who shall govern; besides, why should I refuse to do the good which the chance of birth has put in my power?"

"You are——" the Dowager stopped to find a

word to express her indignation.—"You are a—— red! a socialist!"

The Count did as he mostly did, when his mother was angry, he remained silent. With Cattie, the Dowager was charming during the few days they remained together. But she took no pains to hide her want of affection for her son. She went so far as to say one day—"It's a puzzle to me, what a charming gifted creature like you could see to love in Armand?"

Cattie winced—she answered coldly. "If I had not esteemed M. de Jençay, I should not have married him."

"Esteem! my dear, don't be ashamed. I am aware that the cleverest woman sometimes adores a great imbecile."

"You don't know the truth," burst from Cattie's lips, and there she stopped.

"Poor Armand!" laughed the Dowager, and kissed her daughter-in-law.

All that evening Cattie was dreadfully cross to her husband. She made him play the part of a child sent to Coventry—she talked to the Dowager—to Yolande quite pleasantly, but never replied to one of his remarks—kicked away the footstool he placed for her

feet—when he closed a window on seeing her shiver, begged it might be opened again, in short was as disagreeable as bad temper could make a woman. And what irritated her more than all, was that she could not have given any reason for her crossness. How could she say to any creature that she was angry, because accused of having married her husband for love. At that instant, she believed she detested him.

When Armand asked her in what way he had vexed her, she answered, "I hate explanations."

In a few days the Dowager went away, and all the people on whom the Count and Countess Armand had left cards, came to the château. In the excitement of playing her new part, Cattie forgot her ill humour, and became again smiling and charming. Every one was enchanted with the grace and affability of the new Châtelaine. "Who could have thought, '*une Anglaise*,' could be so affable—so cordial? so well dressed!" To be sure scarcely any of Cattie's visitors had ever seen Englishwomen, save in the chance encounters of a railway carriage, at a table d'hôte, or an exhibition. Now, those are just the places in which female England shines to least advantage, laying aside, in general, as they don their travelling

costume, their good taste in dress, and their pleasant home manners. It was not therefore quite due to national prejudices that the visitors to the château persisted in believing that this "*aimable Comtesse*," could not be of unmixed English blood.

Old and young, the gay, the worldly, the grave man of books, the young poet, the wise and the simple alike sought her society. So great indeed was her popularity, that she ought to have asked herself what stupidity she had been guilty of to produce such an effect.

Even the Pasteur and the Curé met amicably in her salon. The little Curé was even troubled in conscience by the degree of his goodwill and respect for her. How could he help it, when she had provided him with rich new vestments—when she made him always welcome—and was always putting money into his purse for the poor. Many a prayer he offered up for this good and beloved heretic—"Quelle bonne âme," he would ejaculate—and Brigitte, his Reverence's cross and devoted cook allowed that "Madame was not naughty, though she had been told she was not properly married. None of the English could be, more the pity for them." "L'adorable femme,"

was the chorus of town and country; and Cattie, far from seeking for faults in herself, enjoyed the homage she received, and the incense continually burned before her.

And Monsieur de Jençay? Oh! he headed the adorers and did his utmost to spoil his wife. What, though she was sometimes capricious, as little to be depended on in private life, as an April day! She was his own—she was happy. Was that not an ample return for all he could do for her? When she was older, or a mother, all these girlishnesses would disappear. He knew that the warp was excellent—that there was the making of a good woman in her. One day she would give him the happy home he coveted.

Nothing that Cattie desired, but he agreed to—she had her studio, in which she might shut herself up for hours, either painting or practising. She did what she pleased, and only what she pleased.

In general, such a régime spoils what is good, but the effect was different on Cattie. Her heart softened and warmed; she grew daily more and more attached to her husband. She often even went in search of him when she had not seen him for

some hours. She began to take an interest in his plans. He was building what was intended to be a paper manufactory. As long as his mother had lived at La Gonesse, she had opposed this wish of his. She insisted on the old plan of almsgiving and dependence, and he on the advantages of independence gained by work. He had now embarked a considerable sum in this undertaking, and he was grateful to Cattie for the sympathy and approval she bestowed on it. He admired her also for her kindness to Yolande, whom the Dowager had chosen to consider a fixture at La Gonesse.

The heaven of the château was without a cloud. Cattie, even Cattie, asked herself how she had deserved so happy a fate.

In all her letters to Mayfield there was a continual mention of her husband's name.

"Thank God!" would Mr. Sinclair sometimes say after receiving one,—an exclamation that showed he had had some anxiety.

"Cattie a domestic woman! I never could have believed it," said Miss Sinclair.

"Cattie could be anything she wished," observed Miss Toynbee. "And what woman but must learn to love my Count."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STAB IN THE DARK.

ALL of a sudden the clear summer of their content darkened.

Cattie had met her husband at the midday breakfast with a face brimful of mirth and mischief.

"Guess, guess, who is going to be married. But you never can. It is Bessie the proper! Bessie the wise!"

"Miss Sinclair! I am very glad; she will make an excellent wife."

"Oh, Armand, how can you be so stupid? Don't you see the absurdity?"

"No; what is it?"

"Not Bessie being made love to! sitting bolt upright on her chair, dreading every instant that she may be listening to or doing something derogatory to

woman's dignity! I wonder if she has allowed *the beloved object to press his lips to hers.*"

"Probably he has not waited for permission;" and Armand bent down to kiss her, but Cattie with a quick movement turned her head so that it was the ribbon round her hair, and not her cheek, that met his lips.

"Be quiet and listen to my news. Bessie is going to marry very well—one of the law lords. He is not in his first youth, to be sure; but his only child is married, for he is a widower. Tottie says, 'He seems very fond of Bessie; but he has grey hair.'"

"And Miss May?"

"Oh, Miss May is very well," said Cattie, sharply.

"She must marry soon. She is so good and so pretty," said the Count.

"I wonder you did not choose her instead of me."

"But she might not have chosen me," and he laughed.

"How did you venture to think I would take you? I was within an ace of saying No."

"Really!"

"Yes, really. Why should you doubt it."

Yolande coming in put a stop to the conversation. She had had a letter from the Dowager, who, by way of varying her pleasures, had gone with some friends to St. Petersburgh, where, as she said, she was not deafened by the cry about liberty.

All at once Monsieur de Jençay was sensible of a change in his wife's manner. Her eyes never met his but with a glance that pierced like cold steel. She repulsed his attentions, not roughly, but with a quiet decision difficult to contend with. When they were alone, either she took up a book or went to the piano; when they rode or drove, she never spoke to him but on subjects relating to the house or about some social necessity. At first he thought this merely a new caprice, a falling back, the cause of which she would soon confess, and be the first to smile at.

But as days wore on, and this coldness and evident avoidance of him continued, he asked her what was the matter.

She asked, "What do you mean?" in a tone of contempt that no husband, be he lover or not, could hear unmoved.

"If I have done anything to displease you, or left anything undone that you wished, tell me."

"I have no complaint to make."

"Then it is I who have a right to complain if you behave as you do without a cause."

She was silent. He sat down by her.

"Come, Cattie, let us be friends again. I will not tease you with questions. You know that the most earnest desire of my heart is to make you happy. I am wretched when I see you vexed;" and he would have taken her hand.

She flung from him, saying, "You are thoroughly disagreeable to me." The words she used were: "Vous m'êtes entièrement antipathique."

His whole face changed—decomposed, I should say: every line so deepened as to give him a look of age. He turned away that she should not see the tears that clouded his sight.

Here was the explanation she would not give: Madame Regnier, one of the ladies of St. Blaize whom Cattie liked best, had brought her two young daughters to La Gonesse to spend the afternoon, the very afternoon of the morning when Cattie had heard of Bessy Sinclair's intended marriage.

When Madame Armand had gone to the croquet-ground with Léonie and Emma she was already ruffled. She had forgotten the cause, but the effect was there; but by the time the game of croquet had been played, she was quite her happy gay self again.

They had set down to rest in a summer-house, the walls and roof of which were of the hornbeam. Such a retreat is called a "salle de verdure" in France.

The two young girls were never tired of asking questions about England and the English; and they were so droll in their suppositions and prejudices that Cattie encouraged them to talk. This afternoon they were very eloquent; they had been reading English history with their professor, and how it had made their blood boil; such treachery, always such treachery. And why did Macaulay not mention Jeanne d'Arc? Their professor, who knew the English language, said she was not named; it was very unjust. When their writers wrote of the battle of Waterloo, they always named the English General. But dear, dear Madame Armand must not be angry with them; for though they hated the English they adored her, and then she was now half French.

"No, no; I am altogether English."

"That could not be. She must be French as she was a Frenchman's wife."

"I should not wonder but that you both married Englishmen; people constantly do what they say they never will do."

"I would rather die than marry any man but of my own country," said both girls. And then they went on to speak as English girls only do to bosom friends of their own age. They talked openly of their "petit mari" in expectation. Mamma would not allow them to marry for three years; but they had had a proposal as well as Mathilde Lebas, only the gentleman had not made it for one of them in particular; he had asked papa for one of his daughters. They had both seen their ideal; but oh, malheur! he was married and had three little children, dear Madame.

"He would not have suited thee," said Léonie.

"No, nor thee," retorted Emma.

"What had Madame thought of M. de Jençay the first time she saw him?"

"That he was like all the pictures of Frenchmen I had seen."

"But you liked him directly?"

"I neither liked nor disliked him," replied Cattie, laughing at the way she was being cross-examined.

"Ah, you will not confide in us, but we know how you loved him; and it makes us shudder to think if M. de Jençay had not overheard some old gentleman say you loved him he would have gone away."

"And what was the end of my mother-in-law's story?" said Cattie, smiling and patting Léonie's shoulder.

"Oh, she said that when she heard that he was determined to marry you, whether she gave her consent or not, well! as she wanted him married, she agreed."

"It sounded like a novel," put in the less chatty Emma.

"It is a pure invention, my dear children; not a word of truth in it," said Cattie, in a voice made calm by strong determination.

The girls did not look convinced.

"Perhaps Monsieur Armand did not tell you what he had heard."

"He would had it been true. You must not

costume, their good taste in dress, and their pleasant home manners. It was not therefore quite due to national prejudices that the visitors to the château persisted in believing that this "*aimable Comtesse*," could not be of unmixed English blood.

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In general, such a régime spoils what is good, but the effect was different on Cattie. Her heart softened and warmed; she grew daily more and more attached to her husband. She often even went in search of him when she had not seen him for

believe all you hear, and I hope if you have an opportunity you will say that Madame de Jençay did not know what she was talking about. She was romancing."

"You are not angry, dear Madame?"

"No, dear little ones. Shall I tell you a secret —a true secret? I have been planning something."

"A ball?"

"No; it is something else besides a ball."

"Pray, pray!

"Charades, or perhaps a play."

Cattie had at first spoken merely to say something that should divert the attention of the two girls from the topic of her marriage. She spoke at random, her heart full to bursting of anger, scorn, and a wild desire for vengeance. No accusation does so madden a proud delicate-minded young woman as that of loving unsought; and to be told point blank that *she*, Cattie, had been married because de Jençay knew that she loved him! She was frightened herself at the furious passion which sent the blood in such hot torrents to her head. And yet she forced herself to talk of her intended party till the Regniers went. Five minutes more of

that struggle and she must have lost consciousness. She rushed to the solitude she so much needed.

There must be some foundation for the story those children had told. She recollected several hints of the Dowager which had puzzled and surprised her, and Armand's incredulity of tone and look only that very morning when she said that she had been within an ace of refusing him. Yes, there was something in the background—some cruel lie, of which she was ignorant. The old gentleman could be no other than uncle Dan; he had laid a trap into which she and Armand had both fallen. But why should uncle Dan have wished to bring about her marriage. To scheme and deceive, merely to get rid of her. It was monstrous, but she would not bear the imputation. She would expose the falsehood, make Armand know that she had not loved him, had not even liked him. Stupid, stupid fools that they both were! She covered her face, blinded by a sudden light. There was no shutting out the conviction that the very front of de Jençay's offence—if offence it was—had its rise in the goodness and gratitude of a manly heart. He had done her no wrong.

The more clearly she perceived that she, and not

Armand, had been to blame, that she had sinned against herself, not he against her, the more did her heart shut him out. What right had he to ask her to marry him for any other reason than because he loved her? No, it was not from goodness or generosity, pah! but from vanity—sheer vanity. Had he not wit enough to guess that, sooner or later, she would discover the deception, and resent it. He had destroyed her chance of happiness. He had destroyed her faith in human beings. Had she not accepted his lies as truths? She had been proud of inspiring such a love, and all the while, the people about her had been pointing at her, as married out of pity! What a flame of fury, what a stab of mortification, the thought gave. There exists in these frightful moral struggles the lawlessness of madness. It was this which made this poor Cattie thank God, in the blindness of her passion, that she had a right to hate and scorn her husband, as a cowardly braggart. She thanked God that he did love her. Yes, she knew he did now, whatever he had done before her marriage. She held his punishment and her revenge.

The inevitable moment of reaction came which, through the weakness of the body, saves the spirit.

The demon that had been rending her departed, and she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

She awoke calmed indeed, but unforgiving. Wounds to self-love are the hardest to heal. She determined on her course. She would keep strictly within the letter of the law; he should have no legal ground of complaint. Not a qualm of self-reproach made her hesitate. She had told him no falsehoods; he had never brought her to say "she loved him." Till now she had certainly felt esteem—a sort of gratitude —but he had wiped away all that by his boasting. Nor could she accuse herself of marrying for rank or money. No. She had married because she had felt herself becoming a weight to her benefactor, because Bessie viewed her with distrust, and that keen courage had lost its edge which once would have bid her to conquer independence by her own exertions. Oh! why had Mr. Sinclair prevented her!

Poor Cattie! Every one was to blame but herself. It was an awful course she was chalking out for herself. To live without hope, without confidence, to have all the appearances of happiness, none of the reality, voluntarily to do this could only be the act of a mind jangled and out of tune.

Once—it was after she had told Armand that he was insupportable to her—she had had a fit of remorse, and it had led her to catechize Mdlle. de Kerouanne about what had passed between the mother and son as to his marriage. The unsuspecting Yolande answered every question with a fatal precision.

Madame de Jençay had opposed Armand, and he had declared that he would propose for the English young lady. He had suffered enough to know the value of affection, and, therefore, he should marry Miss Leighton, with or without his mother's consent.

"And so she yielded?"

"Ah! yes. She tired of the place and of quarrelling, and then it was she said a good thing you were a foreigner, there would be no trouble as to your family; and she did not want the name to die out."

"Strange he did not marry earlier."

"There was some story my aunt did not tell me, but I think Armand was very fond of somebody he could not marry; but that was long ago."

"So they took me as a pis-aller?"

"It is not often that men can marry their first

love," said Yolande, "you can understand that, as they never can talk much with young ladies; it's a very good custom in your country, to give more liberty to girls,—that was how you learned to love Armand."

Cattie bit her lip. "In my country, as here, women marry for other reasons than love,—we are no better than our neighbours, Yolande."

"Oh, yes! I see that you are, you are perfection; don't be angry with me for saying so; I feel it, and I believe all your countrywomen must be cleverer and better and lovelier than we are." The great honest eyes attested every word that Yolande spoke.

Cattie stood up, and resting her two hands on the shoulders of the seated giantess, said; "I *do* believe in your love Yolande, just as I do in Diana's,"—the dog lying at her feet. "You are luckily not clever enough to play a part."

To the outer world, Madame Armand remained the same adorable woman it had dubbed her. The surface was in direct contradiction to what was below. Above not a ripple, below a tempest. Apparently domestic peace and confidence, in reality absence of either,—a void.

Madame Armand talked, laughed, was more sparkling than ever, perhaps her piquancy was occasionally a little over sharp, her wit a little cruel; taking revenge on her heart.

For each day Cattie had her project,—dinners, pic-nics, soirées, croquet parties. She was never at home without guests. With marvellous persistency, she maintained the distance she chose between her husband and herself, and that, without even once shocking or rebelling against social laws; Armand, and he alone, knew what a mere simulacrum of a wife he had. The marble before the miracle, was not colder to Pygmalion than Cattie to him.

Armand would have found it difficult to describe the sentiments agitating him. He knew that he suffered horribly, for Cattie had taken possession of his whole being. It seems somehow or other that ill usage, far from weakening love, has the effect of deepening it. De Jençay wondered within himself that such a character as Cattie's did not chill his affection, wondered as so many have done and will do, that a love so tender and true could fail to meet a just return. But it is not sufficient to offer a treasure, one must get it accepted.

Nor was it one of those situations where advice could be asked. How lay bare, to even the most friendly eye, a suffering like this? and in fact, what redress had a man of delicacy, of feeling, in such a case? Add to this, that he had no clue to the mystery of Cattie's present conduct. He felt like one in a labyrinth aware of the horror of his position, and at the same time hopeless of overcoming it. One day on returning from overlooking the builders, he heard peals of laughter proceeding from the great salon. He went thither and found his wife at the piano, and a certain Monsieur Douai standing by her side. As he entered Cattie sung with emphasis :—

"Aujourd'hui nous dirons, je t'aime."

M. Douai replied: "Nous le dirons encore demain."

They were practising a duett, that was clear.

Cattie turned all sorts of colours at sight of her husband; but recovering her presence of mind, she said, quoting: "Ne lui parlons pas, il devinerait mon secret."

De Jençay glanced round, and seeing Yolande working in a corner, he left the room without a word.

In the evening, he asked, with evident displeasure, the explanation of the scene of the morning.

"It needs none. We are getting up the 'Rendez-vous Bourgeois,'" answered Cattie, without lifting up her eyes from the book she was pretending to be engrossed with.

"You should have consulted me before deciding to do so."

"Why?" and she looked at him, her eyes flashing all their fire on him.

"It might be disagreeable to me."

"I did right, then, not to have any previous discussion, as I mean to act it."

"I hope not against my expressed wish to the contrary."

"You had better go through town and country and publish, that because Madame de Jençay wishes to act a play, Monsieur de Jençay forbids it."

"I should be glad, Cattie, if you would remember that you are Madame de Jençay."

"Do you think I ever forget that fact? On the contrary, it is always before my eyes; I cannot shut it out do what I will." She spoke quietly, with no raising of her voice, and her eyes again fixed on her book.

"You are wilfully ruining your happiness and mine, Cattie."

"Not mine," she said, pointedly.

"In the name of heaven, what have I done; or what has happened to cause this change in you?"

"You are seeking to force a quarrel on me, but you shall not succeed;" and she went to the piano, and began practising some of the songs of the Vaudeville. How sweet her voice; how arch, how tender, her singing; how every note thrilled to his heart! What a perfect type of lovely, gentle womankind she looked! Could any chance spectator having a glimpse of that salon imagine that discord reigned supreme there?

What was Count Armand to do? Force a quarrel on her, in order to get at the mystery? He dared not contemplate what might be the result of any further contention. Besides, a great love such as his finds a consolation in self-immolation.

The next morning Armand went, as usual, to overlook the progress of his works. Cattie watched him as long as she could distinguish his figure. She marked how listless his step; that he never looked around, but walked straight on, as a blind person

would do. It seemed to her that he, who had been so erect, began to stoop, as one does who carries a heavy burden. She strangled a sigh. Oh! that he had not married her: they might both then have been happy. Her thoughts were not comfortable. Why could he not do as she did—make up his mind to enjoy the pleasures within his power? She could not change herself any more than he could change himself. She had half a mind to give up that stupid play, about which she really cared nothing, and had promised in a moment of recklessness.

Most people have read the story of Sintram and his two attendant spirits. We all hear the clanking of chains, the rattling of bones, the sweet hymns, urging us this way and that, as we struggle through the battle we call life.

Cattie went down into the flower-garden: there had been a shower, and the earth gave up its most grateful perfume. The roses hung their heads, drooping with moisture; blackbirds were busy taking their early meal on the close-shaven grass; the sound of hammers and the murmurs of busy men's voices were brought to her, softened by the warm breeze; the château itself had an air of home and

comfort. "All yours," whispered the good spirit. "Waste not these good days; be like unto a little child; be good and loving, and happiness is yours!" Cattie, listening to the low whispers, stood before a tall thistle; one that she had insisted on having sent to La Gonesse at the time of her marriage. An odd smile passed over her face.

"I warned him that you were my symbol," she said, half aloud. "I have a mind to have it painted as our crest in every room."

The good spirit was vanishing.

Unluckily, she was in the vestibule as Armand returned to breakfast; and she heard him both speaking and laughing cheerfully.

"I am a fool for my pains: he is a true Frenchman, incapable of any strong or lasting feeling. If I were to die, in three days he would be consoled."

It was the little Curé, who had met Monsieur le Comte, and Monsieur had invited him to breakfast.

How the little man eat and talked! The people were busy, and, therefore, well behaved. It was a comfort that the young girls, who were the trouble of his life, always wanting to go to Paris, or into convents, always getting into some mischief, would

now have a chance. That paper-mill was to turn the village into a paradise, and all the girls into Rosières; so said the Curé. He talked for the whole party. Cattie smiled on him just as she would have done on some schoolboy out for a holiday. She never could take him in earnest as a priest.

Armand had been glad to have a guest at the breakfast-table. A family party was beginning to be as irksome to him as to Cattie.

Monsieur Douai arrived in the afternoon, as Cattie had invited him to do, bringing with him a young pianist to play the accompaniments.

This Monsieur Douai was one of those men whom friends advise women to keep at a distance,—clever, insinuating, a gossip, and underbred. "Use him carefully," was the advice Madame Regnier had given Madame Armand.

Now Cattie was one of those persons who, with a pretension to great judgment on every subject, blunder continually in their own conduct. As, for example, she did now, in letting Monsieur Douai know that she and her husband had disagreed about the acting.

His familiar tone of condolence vexed her suffi-

ciently; and just then, to her surprise, M. de Jençay came into the room, and proposed to be their prompter.

Cattie chose to see in this offer a system of espionage, and her pride took the alarm at once. Levity of manner was not one of her besetting follies; in general there was in her manner what, for want of a better term, may be called an "aimable brusquerie;" but on this afternoon, for the sake of punishing Armand, she played the part with a maddening coquetry.

To say the truth, Monsieur Douai behaved unexceptionably. What he might have found agreeable in a *tête-à-tête*, he scarcely relished under the stern eyes of a husband.

"Douai is a fop and a gossip," observed the Count, when the guest was gone.

"I am quite able to take care of myself," was the answer; "and of all detestable creatures, a spy is the most detestable." She was about to leave the room.

"You must listen to me for five minutes, Cattie," and he took her by the hand and led her to a chair. "I know what French manners and habits are. In

England, I believe, it is thought that as soon as a woman in France is married she is at perfect liberty to do as she pleases, and that no fault will be found. A mistake. It is with no wish to watch you that I choose to be present at these rehearsals. However strange your behaviour towards me, my confidence in you is unbounded. It is to prevent the misconstruction your inexperience might occasion. I dislike your acting, I dislike the play you have chosen, but since you fancy you cannot draw back, I will at least appear to approve. You understand now why I choose to be your prompter, and you will take care I always know when the rehearsals are to take place."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Then I suppose I may go now."

It was all very well to brave it out before Armand, but Cattie could have cried at the thought that Armand's precaution had come too late. If a nod from her could have sent Monsieur Douai to the antipodes, she would have assuredly nodded.

Before the next evening Monsieur Douai had entertained the "cercle" (club) with an animated

account of how the little Countess kept her husband in order.

Her acquaintance still continued to go into ecstasies about her looks, her grace, her talents; but there were some who now ventured to say that perhaps she was too brilliant, wanting in that repose, that serious gentleness, which is woman's best portion.

The preparations for the vaudeville went on swimmingly. Scenery was hired, a professional stage-manager and professional orchestra, and a professional prompter were engaged. The large conservatory forming one side of the drawing-room was emptied of its rare plants, and the stage erected there, leaving the salon free for the spectators.

The theatricals at the château were talked of all through the department, and invitations were eagerly canvassed for, and which Cattie gave with a bountiful hand. She had begun to feel as all women do who are not happy at home, that she must not make enemies.

The long-expected evening came at last, and carriages rolled for an hour incessantly under the old archway. Never had there been such gay doings

within those walls. Madame Armand received her guests with all that *savoir faire* for which she had been remarked, giving to each exactly that which was their due.

To enable her to play the part of courteous hostess, there was a one act *Lever de Rideau.* The farce chosen was one in which a poor violoncellist, to pay a gambling debt to a hairdresser, offers to give him five hundred lessons at a franc each, and insisting at the same time on giving his creditor a specimen of his talents. The gentleman who played this part, the son of one of the greatest artists of the day, is famed for his performances, not on the instrument, though the deception or illusion is perfect. On this occasion he played an air from the *Puritani,* imitating so completely Piatti, that he drew forth a universal encore. His performance must be heard to have it credited that he can imitate with lips and tongue all the beauties, the pathos, even the imperfections of the violoncello.

The vaudeville was extremely well acted. Cattie acted and sang as though to the manner born. Her voice, her playfulness, her loveliness made her errors of accent overlooked. She ought to have been

satisfied with the unlimited admiration bestowed on her.

M. de Jençay watched his wife with sensations made up of wonder, admiration, and regret. With every fresh proof of talent, with every new burst of enthusiastic applause, a chill fell on him. It was a hopeless case. He could never expect that brilliant fairy to sit at a fireside with none save a husband to admire or to be attracted. He could read in her face how she delighted in the homage of a crowd. He despaired of the future for both of them. Her late coldness, her dissatisfaction was, no doubt, caused by want of excitement. As the piece proceeded, he overheard whispers that made his blood tingle. He could not remain to witness this exhibition of his wife, and the analysing of her face and form. The sweetest notes of her voice jarred on his ears. He slipped away, as he supposed, unnoticed.

It was, perhaps, well for the success of the performance that he disappeared only as it was nearly concluding; for, though others might not remark his absence, Cattie missed him directly. From that moment, she had to make violent efforts to keep up her vivacity.

She was overwhelmed with applause. She tasted of that sound which it is said intoxicates all who are the object of it, giving that strange fascination to the stage which renders it so difficult for public favourites to bid adieu to the footlights.

The last guest was gone—Cattie had smiled her last obligatory smile. She threw herself on a sofa with a yawn that was half a sigh. Her brows were drawn together, her mouth rigid—no longer "the fairy," "the muse," "the grace," "the Hebe," she had heard herself called, but a sullen heavy-eyed woman.

Yolande asked, "Are you not very tired?"

"Yes, very."

"Take something—some wine—some lemonade—some ice?"

"Oh! Yolande, if you only knew how I hate being asked questions."

Yolande was silenced for a minute. Then she began, as timid as kind-hearted people are when they have to do with ill temper,—

"It has been a charming evening; and you were so admired. Such raptures as Monsieur le Préfet was in; and Monsieur Delaunay said——"

"Spare me—it's quite enough to have heard their foolish speeches once. I hope you observed the way M. de Jençay tried to spoil everything?"

"Did he? It is true Armand doesn't like parties; but I thought he paid great attention to the play."

"He took care to show he did not like it. It was downright ill-natured. He hoped to put me out; and he went away just as I was beginning my best song."

"That was very bad," said Yolande; "but I daresay he didn't think you would care."

"You are enough to fret a saint, Yolande. I tell you, he knew I should see. He did it to vex me. It was a mean way of revenging himself. He meant every one to see that he did not care for my singing. It will be long enough before he will have another opportunity of insulting me."

And having lashed herself into a passion, Cattie went away to bed without any good-night to Yolande.

The good Géante cried bitterly, because her idol was naughty; and to think that the same person who was creating sorrow and uneasiness all round

her, had it in her power to have dispensed contentment and happiness. And all this wretchedness for a slight wound,—nay, not so much as a wound, —a scratch to self-love! Poor Cattie! she had yet to learn that the one who loves most is the one that is wisest.

CHAPTER IX.

LUCUS À NON LUCENDO.

Bessie Sinclair's wedding was to take place in September, and as she was to come abroad for her wedding-trip, de Jençay proposed to Cattie that they should invite the newly married couple and May to la Gonnesse. But no, Cattie would not hear of any thing of the kind. She would not have Bessie her visitor, as a married woman, for all the world. She knew how it would be—such obedience, such submissiveness, such tender attentions *de part d'autre*. She should die of the exhibition.

Cattie, in this mood, was so thoroughly and unreasonably feminine, so pretty, and so piquante, that her husband scarcely knew whether to laugh at or be angry with her. She read the admiration in his eye, and added, with still more decision,—

"I won't have her."

"But it will seem very strange," began her husband.

"Not at all, if we are not at home. Let us go somewhere—anywhere; but here I will not have them."

At dinner, Cattie had a plan to propose. She had seen half-a-dozen people—they were going to Baden-Baden—there were to be operas and concerts —first-rate singers—why should she not write and propose to meet Bessie and her spouse there. It would not be out of their route.

So it was decided—the proposal was made, and the rendezvous accepted.

Cattie pressed Yolande to be one of the party; but Yolande was busy watching the progress of the dahlias, and did not like moving about.

"I will let you off this time," said Cattie, "but you must spend the winter with us in Paris"—here a side glance at de Jençay. "I can't do without you, Yolande—you are the only person who always thinks me right."

Madame Armand was still under the belief that Mdlle. de Kerouanne was dependent on the de

Jençays, and it was one of the good actions of her life, the undeviating kindness and respect with which she treated the supposed poor relation.

Yolande therefore remained at La Gonesse, charged to report the progress of the works, and to help the Curé to manage the parish.

By the second week of September, the Count and Countess were installed in one of the best suites of rooms in the Hollandischer Hof.

Pretty, theatrical, Baden—tricked out and ornamented as a figure in a fashion-book, in a frame of dark forest, austere as virtue itself. The visitors to Baden are not among those who find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, or sermons in stones.

De Jençay found a crowd of acquaintances there; among them the Duke his godfather, and the Prince his cousin. They were nicknamed "*l'homme leger*," and "*l'homme lourd.*"

The first earned his sobriquet, because he was so thoroughly good-natured—so easily pleased—very few had fathomed the reason of these peculiarities. The fact was, that the Duke had a profound knowledge of mankind—the result was a great deal of pity, with a

slight admixture of contempt. "I prefer laughing to crying," he would say—and he showed that he did. "L'homme lourd" was as amiable as an egotist can be. He was not averse to help his neighbour, but on condition that it gave him no personal trouble. He would have paid the expenses of the wounded Samaritan; assuredly he would not have crossed the road to lift him up. He spoke little, though in truth a well-informed man; he refused mentally, as well as bodily to go out of his way—whereas the Duke was ready to do both. The greatest self-sacrifice of the Prince's life was the journey to Scotland at the time of de Jençay's marriage, and it was shrewdly suspected that the Duke had carried him off by surprise. The Prince had never married, and the Duke was a widower, with a daughter, whose perfections as wife and mother he never tired of describing.

Hearing him talk of his grandchildren, gave you quite another measure of the man from that which you took of him in salons.

When Cattie had come to understand and like him, she lectured him one day, on the absurd speeches he made to women.

"Ah! chere dame, do not try to change me—it

is a gymnastic of the mind that does me good—and they like it—they like to be forced to laugh."

"But it makes you undervalued."

"What does that matter—I amuse and am amused. Once I began to take things seriously, I should have to become a monk."

"You are never to talk in that disgraceful way to me."

"Oh! as to you—that is another affair—first you are English, and you would cry shocking;" it was a treat to hear the Duke pronounce the word. "Besides you are a sort of god-daughter, and I shall look after you like an old papa."

Acquaintances and connections were equally ready to find the Countess charming, and she was soon in a whirl of gaiety that separated her as much from de Jençay, as though the wall of China had divided them. And this, though he was always present wherever she might be.

At a concert at which Rubinstein played, and Patti sung, Cattie was seated next a lady whom she had already remarked. Her age might be forty, and her face was one of those of which Longfellow says, "it has a story to tell."

It was a long, narrow face, with eyes that were not French; they seemed inherited from some Moorish ancestor. The brows were drawn together, as under the pressure of a fixed idea. If thinness be aristocratic, then might this lady be supposed of blood royal. She sat gracefully, and her dress, that revealer of the character of our tastes, had something artistic in its arrangement. Altogether, she was not a person to be overlooked even in a Baden crowd.

While Rubinstein was playing, she let fall various involuntary expressions of admiration, and once when her eyes met those of Cattie, the latter was astonished at the change produced on that hard, dark face by a smile. Before the end of the concert, they had interchanged opinions as to the performance, and parted with friendly bows. The next day, they met in one of the public walks, and the Duke and the other gentlemen accompanying the Countess, lifted their hats to her neighbour of the evening before.

"Who is she?" asked Cattie.

"A most charming woman; remarkable talents; quite out of the common line," replied the Duke; his lorgnon on his noble nose, staring intrepidly at some glaring specimen of fashion, and bowing right and left.

"You have told me what she is, and not who," said Cattie.

The Duke was so busy with his bows and stares that he scarcely understood the question. It was another of the group who answered, "That is Madame d'Aiguillon."

"Has she gained the apostrophe?" asked a third.

"All I can say is that on her cards her name appears with a little *d*, a big A, and the apostrophe."

"What folly," said the Duke, returning to the conversation; "and in a country which has got rid of the prejudices of yours, dear lady," addressing Cattie.

"I have taken a fancy to Madame d'Aiguillon. She has a different look from other people. Her face comes back upon me as a familiar one."

"Lucky it is a woman's," said the Duke, whispering. "Don't you know that's one of the signs of a beginning love?"

"No," returned Cattie.

"But you have some experience, belle dame?"

Cattie turned her head away.

"Ah! I am *shocking*," and the Duke laughed. "You English are not ashamed of doing, only of the name of what you do."

How unconsciously people set other folk's teeth on edge!

"I must let Madame d'Aiguillon know your sentiments towards her," went on the Duke. "She is amiable certainly, but she is a candid soul, and declares she prefers the society of men to that of her own sex, but she is 'bonne femme' at the bottom."

As the two groups repassed, the Duke left Cattie, and went to Madame d'Aiguillon's side. Presently that lady came to the Countess, with a graceful cordiality quite winning. Cattie, on her side, was equally gracious, repeating what she had already said to the Duke, that it seemed to her as if she must already have met Madame d'Aiguillon.

"In some previous and, I hope, better world, but I could never have seen *you*, and forgotten you," was the flattering reply.

Both ladies having rooms in the same hotel, nothing easier than to meet without ceremony.

"I am sorry you have made Madame d'Aiguillon's acquaintance," said de Jençay, on the first opportunity.

"Why? What is the matter with her?"

"She is that unfortunate creature, a 'femme

incomprise.' She has had everything on earth to make her happy, and she goes about the world lamenting her fate, playing the victim."

"There's a proverb which says that only those who wear the shoe know where it pinches. Appearances are as often false one way as the other. I don't believe any one complains without a cause."

He looked earnestly at her, and said, "Are you happy?"

"No, I am not," she answered, firmly.

"Will you explain to me why you are not so?"

"It would be quite useless. The cause is quite beyond your power or mine to remove. I am reasonable. I enjoy all the pleasures within my reach, and as for happiness, I am learning that one can do without it very well."

"My poor foolish Cattie!" he said, in a tone that love alone lends to the human voice, and ere she was aware of it, she was pressed against his heart. He had left the room before she had recovered from her astonishment.

Was Cattie in perfect good faith with herself when she made up her mind to show that she resented this caress. It was clear that she was a greater novice

than the Duke took her for. She did not know that in so much hatred love lies hidden. One thing is certain that opposition only increased her interest in Madame d'Aiguillon. Between impressionable people intimacies ripen apace, and die out generally as quickly. The Countess and her new acquaintance speedily became inseparable.

Madame d'Aiguillon spoke, with all the candour the Duke had attributed to her, of her disappointments and deceptions. She was indignantly pathetic over the disillusions matrimony brings. "The woman who loves is never loved," would she say. "It is not the intellectual qualities men care for—the animal governs them. Heaven knows, I had the capability of devotion, but of what avail when the devotion is not valued. Ah! how I have hoped, dreamed, nay—even at my age—I still dream of a life à deux, but it is a dream, with always the same terribly matter-of-fact conclusion."

Once she said to Cattie, "You are favoured by fate."

Now Cattie did not wish to tell her story, and yet she would not tell an untruth. She hesitated, and Madame d'Aiguillon went on,—

"Ah! poor child, another victim to the Juggernaut matrimony."

"You misunderstand," said Cattie; "I have no complaint to make against M. de Jençay."

Madame d'Aiguillon studied the expressive face before her, and failed in understanding its language.

She said:—

"You are afraid to speak candidly. I always say what I think, and the essence of my experience is that there are only two classes of men,—those who fawn on women, and those on whom women fawn,—the spaniel or the mastiff. You don't agree with me, I see."

"No, because I have known a man whom to know would be sufficient to make you, madame, believe in men's goodness. I am not a very good specimen myself,"—and Cattie's features worked with repressed emotion—"but I believe that there are good, noble-minded people in the world."

"Dear enthusiast!" said Madame d'Aiguillon. "I, too, once had such sentiments. I have an inclination to tell you my story; quite a romance of the heart,—no startling events, merely the gradual wearing out of spirit and body."

Madame d'Aiguillon told her story with bitter eloquence. She laid bare with passionate sincerity her hopes and desires, her pride, even her vanity. She showed all the secret wounds of her disappointed, ambitious soul. The fault was that of fate, which had given her a husband incapable of understanding her; in short every person or thing connected with her was to blame,—all except herself. She disconnected her character entirely from the events of her life. To hear her, you would have supposed she had been as passive in the forging of her trials as Iphigenia; as completely the sport of fate as any of the heroes of Greek tragedy.

The truth, however, was, that in youth her talents and her grace had made her the star of a brilliant circle, had surrounded her with worshippers. In spite of her real gifts, she enjoyed the coarse adulation of a mixed crowd. Her youth had been what the French call "*une jeunesse orageuse.*" She herself allowed that she had been a coquette. "Why did not my husband prevent me?" She did not add, that she had laughed his efforts to scorn. But all prestige, let it be of what kind it will, has its allotted time; and Madame d'Aiguillon considered

that, which is a universal ever recurring fact, to be her peculiar individual trial. The void she felt she resented as an injury; reproaches, and recriminations, and low spirits thinned her circle day by day. Unable to yield her place gracefully, to become the admirer instead of the admired, she was now seeking by means of her pen a new sphere of distinction. No doubt she had ability, but her book was an air with variations played on one string. Self-commiseration the theme, varied by lamp-black portraits of those who had been her intimates. Every outward charm mercilessly torn from them, nothing left but grimacing skeletons. In all that she wrote there was not a description that the reader could be glad to dwell on. Had Cattie's mind been in a more healthy state, she could not have failed to detect the weakness, nay, absurdity, of many of her new friend's tenets. Even as it was, she could not help feeling that in Madame d'Aiguillon she caught a distorted shadow of herself. It was a surprise to her to find that there was not only a Monsieur d'Aiguillon alive, but also a Mr. Albert d'Aiguillon, a youth now at St. Cyr.

Madame d'Aiguillon dismissed her husband from

the conversation, as from her life, with the remarks: "M. d'Aiguillon prefers the cultivation of his land to the cultivation of his mind. Paris overwhelms him with a sense of his own nothingness; whereas every one for leagues round Chamfort lifts his hat to him. He is well meaning; never intends, I acknowledge, to pain me; but, oh, mon Dieu! how he makes me suffer when we are together. As for my son, he will go into the army; he will do his duty—rise to be a general. But what comfort can I find in him? He is as devoid of delicacy of sentiment as his father." At other times, Madame d'Aiguillon would take a maternal tone. She would say: "Avoid my fatal fault—that of all girls—at the beginning of my marriage,—I gave way in everything." The speaker believed her own words. "I allowed myself to be buried in the country, condemned to a tête-à-tête with a man in horribly strong health, who eat and drank and talked for four; and snored—how he did snore!—every evening. If I had insisted on living half the year in Paris, he would have been forced to behave like a civilized creature, and I should never have had my white feathers ruffled."

Detecting alarm in Cattie's eyes, Madame d'Ai-

guillon added, "No, no, you need not be afraid; I never lost the tip of a feather."

Lord Dalgleish and his bride, accompanied by May, arrived at Baden Baden.

The Lord of Session was a little, thin, long-faced, sandy-haired gentleman, of a certain age, and with the quiet, shy manners of a student. He had known Bessie Sinclair during the lifetime of his first wife, and had been one of the married men who considered her as a pattern for her sex. It was only by some such concatenation of circumstances, that Bessie could have become sufficiently intimate with any man to allow of his daring to ask her to marry him.

Lord Dalgleish had assured her of his admiration for her, since her fourteenth year,—an admiration that had developed into a tender attachment since the sad loss of Mrs. Dalgleish.

This was not said, but written, and after a fortnight's consideration, Bessie wrote her consent. If ever marriage promised well, it was this one; the gentleman and lady were as perfectly acquainted with each other's character as any two persons can be, before the nuptial benediction is pronounced.

Bessie, too, had had the inestimable privilege of hearing many particulars of his lordship from the first Mrs. Dalgleish. Therefore, she accepted him with her eyes open, and very well satisfied she seemed. She was Bessie Sinclair a little stronger in colour physically and morally. The only touch of humour that had ever been perceptible about her was, when she talked of her sons,—that is, her husband's sons, who were much of her own age.

May was thinner and paler; her roses were all white ones; in nothing else altered, the same sweet sedateness, the same devotion to others, the same willingness to accept the pleasures of every one else, as her own.

Cattie had not expected to feel any particular emotion at the sight of Bessie and May, and it was a surprise to her to find that, no sooner did she see their once familiar faces, hear their once familiar voices, it required a strong effort on her part not to burst into tears. The good spirit now stepped into the place of the evil one. But she would not have owned, though it was true, that their presence seemed to lift away a veil through which she had lately been viewing many things; she felt morally

what she had often felt physically in coming out of a heated, vitiated atmosphere, into the pure cool air. Their conversation was like a long unheard melody, bringing back with it old associations, old feelings.

To hear her talking to her friends, asking news, and speaking affectionately and gratefully of Mr. Sinclair, and of Miss Toynbee; even of aunt Polly, and many carelessly treated once, but whom memory surrounded with a tender light, gave de Jençay the first happy hours he had had for many weeks. Then Cattie was more gentle to himself; she would have indignantly denied it, had anyone told her so, but it was the case nevertheless, that the presence of her Scotch friends kept her in check. She excused herself to herself for this semblance of cordiality to her husband by saying, "She did not choose that Bessie or May should think she was to be pitied, or uncle Dan be gratified by believing she was unhappy. Even Lord Dalgleish, who, remembering what Cattie had been, had at first shrunk back from the brilliant Countess, confided to his wife's ear that he considered her friend was vastly improved.

All must fade, the sweetest the soonest, and this

pleasant state of matters was ruined by French prejudice.

One day the Duke—his *prononcée* manner had not found favour with Mrs. Dalgleish or May—well, the Duke spoke sarcastically of their unattractive manners. "Did the English consider grace and affability incompatible with virtue?"

De Jençay warmly took up the defence, passing an encomium that set all Cattie's nerves vibrating.

"Beautiful, pure as untrodden snow, gentle, kind, was Miss May, the innocence of her soul could be read in her eyes; to him it seemed that she was the type of all most admirable in woman." Did this enthusiasm spring from the bitterness of his disappointment in Cattie? was it the outspeaking of some former feeling?

"He-he-he!" said the Duke, with a side glance at the Countess.

"You have heard the Count's opinion," said Cattie; the only sign of flutter was a little breathlessness; "and you will believe it, and try to appreciate my friend, when I assure you it is every syllable true."

"I always judge of a woman by the way she

listens to the praise of another, and if it were possible, you have made more fervent my belief in your superiority, dear lady;" and then the Duke changed the conversation, in which Cattie joined with so much suavity that his Grace went away with a great respect for her self-control, and unbounded pity for his godson.

"She will make thee pay for thy words, my boy," he muttered more than once on his homeward way.

Perhaps de Jençay had expected some reproach, some sharp retort, when the Duke left them. Not a word. A pain, an ache, quite novel, kept Cattie silent. Incidents she could not have recalled a day, nay, not an hour before, now stood out from the dimness of the past with startling clearness. Bessie's fidgety anxiety for de Jençay's going, her watchful attentions to May after his departure, May's own avoidance of any mention of him, her pallor and trembling at the marriage ceremony, were all explained. Cattie even suddenly remembered that May alone, of all the family, had not accompanied her to the carriage. The enigma, so puzzling to her hitherto, of why uncle Dan should have sought to bring about her marriage with the Count was solved at last. She

guessed now the cause of the old man's sudden seeking of de Jençay's society. Uncle Dan had used her to shield his darling: he had cared nothing for sacrificing the maiden pride of the orphan his brother was protecting; he had had no pity for the friendless girl; he had ruthlessly sacrificed his own truth and a woman's delicacy. Instinct had warned her truly enough that uncle Dan would do her some mortal injury.

She had not even the sorry comfort of believing that she was the sole sacrifice to an old man's selfish affection. Those words of enthusiastic praise uttered by de Jençay kept on sounding in her ears; praise that could never be applied to her. When before had Cattie ever allowed, even in thought, her own inferiority? Was this the humility of awakening love?

It would have been well had this new-born feeling been left to develop itself; but, unfortunately, with the very best intentions, Mrs. Dalgleish stopped its growth. Women are not easily deceived with regard to their own sex. They unfailingly detect where there is any flaw in happiness, where love does or does not reign.

Luckily for all parties, it was only the morning before the Dalgleishes were to leave Baden that Bessie, finding, or making an opportunity, said to Cattie, "Do you think M. de Jençay looks as well as he used to do?"

"Much the same;" and Cattie added, with a jar in her voice, "accustomed as you are to a rose-and-lily complexion in your husband, no wonder you fancy M. de Jençay's olive green denotes ill health."

Bessie continued, with untroubled calm. "His complexion is what it was at Mayfield; but he is very much thinner than formerly, and really his hands look like the hands of a sick person."

"Are you hinting that he is fretting? Very likely he is regretting the blunder of his marriage; for *you* know as well as I do, that it never would have been but for uncle Dan's interference."

"I know nothing of the kind," said Bessie, losing her temper. "And if M. de Jençay and you are not happy the fault is yours."

"You had not always so favourable an opinion of him."

"I will not be forced into an unseemly discussion," said Mrs. Dalgleish. "I have taken what

I consider the right of an old friend to warn you. I shall not venture again to do so."

"Do me one other kindness, Bessie, for the sake of old times. Tell uncle Dan that I know what he did, and that I, unworthy as he thought me, would not have condescended to a falsehood,—a base, unmanly falsehood,—to gain my own selfish ends. Whatever happens to me, or whatever wrong I do, it is on his head."

Bessie looked what she was, confounded by the message, and the passion with which it was given. An uncomfortable suspicion, not felt for the first time since Cattie's marriage, of some wrong-doing on her uncle's part, made her say,—

"Cattie, if any one has sinned against you, remember that we are taught to hope for the forgiveness of our own debts, by pardoning those who are our debtors."

Cattie shook her head more sadly than angrily.

"Pray say nothing of what has passed just now between us to May. It would make her unhappy if she thought we had had angry words."

"It is the very last subject I should ever touch on with May, for other reasons."

Bessie asked for no explanation.

When May was bidding Cattie good-by, she said, with tears,—

"You still care for us all, dear—do you not? You still love me?"

Cattie laid her head for an instant on May's shoulder, and whispered,—

"As long as there is any good in me, I shall love you and your father. Tell him, the thought of him stands between me and evil."

The next moment she had shaken off her emotion. She said,—

"Will you take a souvenir from me to dear T.? Look; is this turban not an improvement on numbers 1, 2, and 3?"

CHAPTER X.

PAS CONVENABLE.

It was evident to even her slightest acquaintance that, after her Scotch friends' departure, the young Countess had lost the animation which was one of her great attractions.

"Nostalgy!" said the Duke; "and it is surprising! So charming a woman, and yet she regrets a country where pleasure is called shocking!"

The Count knew better than to ascribe his wife's want of spirits to any such cause. The capricious coldness she had shown him for so many weeks assumed now another character. Her provoking indifference, which had hitherto been passive, now often became aggressive. She sat in judgment on his every word; his most harmless remark was sufficient to bring on a violent discussion. Their inter-

course had become so painful that he began to welcome the presence of Madame d'Aiguillon as a safeguard.

Suspicion, that deadly poison, was enervating Cattie's soul. Painful as had been the conviction that uncle Dan had trapped de Jençay into a marriage with her, it was as a wasp's sting to the bite of a viper compared to the pang inflicted by the doubt that May had been the object of her husband's preference.

Cattie's imagination ran riot on this theme—it first evoked phantoms, and then believed in them—argued upon them as realities. She was like one striving to re-ascend a strong current. She battled with memory to bring forth all that had passed during de Jençay's first visit to Mayfield. She bent every faculty towards one point; and by this concentration of all her powers, she divined, where facts to build on failed her.

What a future she foresaw! With a fatal clairvoyance, she traced out the weariness of their two lives, both galled by the chain that bound them, both sinking under the burden of the thousand daily petty annoyances of an unwelcome obligatory intimacy;

and she wished, what all young, ardent, untried spirits wish, in the moments of their first despair—Cattie wished to die.

No wonder that, being in such a frame of mind, she nearly drove de Jençay wild. His bright bird, his joy and his pride, what had changed her to this irritable, susceptible, dull woman? Many and many a time did a thought intrude on him—a thought sedulously banished—one too terrible for the still loving husband to contemplate. The dread pursued him, growing stronger every day. Was there any old taint lingering in her young blood? Her conduct really looked like incipient insanity. Pursued by this fear, his behaviour to her was marked by a tender forbearance that had its effect even on Madame d'Aiguillon.

Once, when Cattie had been more than usually perverse, that lady, to de Jençay's horror, had tapped her own forehead significantly.

One morning a violent storm, a common occurin that region, was followed by a brilliant afternoon. The sun's rays gleamed with renewed splendour over the refreshed earth. Every blade of grass sparkled like gems; the woods were full of the murmurings

of the still tremulous trees; the odour of the pine forêsts scented the air; while over the sky floated fleecy clouds of iris hues.

De Jençay coming by chance into the room where Cattie was sitting alone, struck by the dejection of her whole appearance, asked if she would walk to the old castle to see the sun set. She rose without speaking, and went into the bed-room. "I'll do it to-day," she said, speaking aloud to herself. Doubting whether her silence implied consent or not, de Jençay waited ten minutes. She came in just as he had given her up.

The Count did more than enjoy fine scenery, he was an ardent devotee of Nature, and she in return had taught him an indulgent philosophy for all the inconsistencies of the moral world. "Donner et pardonner" was the legend round his crest; "Donner et pardonner" had been the rule of his life. His conduct to his mother was one example; harsh, exacting, unjust as she had been to him, he had given and pardoned. But there were limits to his forbearance. Gentle and affectionate to those he loved and esteemed, he was an uncompromising foe to the mean or the false; something given to

melancholy, to inertness, there was a hidden fire in his temperament which kindled might easily drive him to extremes.

Just now his soul, so to say, saturated with the benignity of the moment, inhaling through every sense the loveliness of earth and sky, his heart yearned towards his companion with tenderness and forgiveness. Feeling thus, he involuntarily pressed the arm leaning on his more closely to his side. Cattie felt his rapid heart-beats. Probably the influence of the scene and the hour had an effect also on her. She did not resist the pressure of her arm, and husband and wife mounted the steep path with that unity of movement typical of a unity of feeling.

I fancy we are all partial to idylls and pastorals. The most rugged among us have a weakness for love stories. Who that ever read *Hermann and Dorothea* but has a sly preference for it over Goëthe's grander works. There is balm of Gilead in the sight of natural affections to all onlookers. The greatest artistic beauty is never satisfactory if it offend our moral feeling. Our immortal souls protest against the disunion of the beautiful and the good.

As husband and wife slowly ascended the hill, every eye that looked on them softened. They lingered about the ruins of the Alte Schloss until, little by little, the distant forest dwindled into a long wavy line of black; they lingered until even the objects near had lost all distinctness of outline, until they had become like some fantastic vision. They had spoken but few words, and those mere observations as to the landscape, and the robber knights, represented in modern days by the proprietors of the gambling tables.

Cattie assented to all her husband said. She was too busy with her thoughts to listen or to converse. Leaning on de Jençay's arm, she was summoning resolution to tell him everything, to have done with disguise, with concealment. She was intimately convinced that whatever he answered it would be the truth. Whether or not he had married her through some trickery of uncle Dan's was now become of secondary consideration. What she wanted to know, what she would know, was, had he preferred May? was May the one he would have proposed to marry had there been no interference? She never took into consideration what she would do if he acknow-

ledged that he had once preferred May. And yet Cattie believed that she did not love her husband, that it was not jealousy which was urging her on.

Yielding to her passionate impulse she said, in a loud voice,—

"Tell me the truth, here under the true open sky: did you, or did you not, prefer May to me?"

For an instant de Jençay hesitated from pure astonishment.

"What a question to put now," he said.

"Tell me the truth."

"I cannot imagine what nonsense has got into your foolish little head, or what end this cross-examining can have, but you shall have an honest answer. I did admire Miss May extremely; everyone who knows her must do so. You are not so regularly beautiful, but you are more graceful. Afterwards I felt all the charm you possess over every other woman I ever met."

"And you married me from no other motive than admiration?"

"Good heavens! what a child it is!" he exclaimed.

For a passing moment she tried to keep down

her rising passion, but the next all the irritation and suspicion of the bygone weeks burst their bonds. Shaking from head to foot, her words fell from her in short, broken, panting sentences.

"I thought you scorned lying. You *were* in love with May. I believe you are now. She is so pure; her innocent soul looks from her eyes. Uncle Dan would not let you have his darling—everyone's darling; but I—I was good enough for the Frenchman. The old man told you I loved you, don't deny it; and you—ha, ha, ha!—you fell into the trap! I did *not* love you; I married for a home, to be rich. I never did—I never shall love you."

It was fortunate that the waning light did not allow of his seeing the face so dear to him convulsed by uncontrollable passion. Had he seen the lovely eyes lose their colour, as blue eyes do in anger, the delicate nostrils inflate, the rosy lips grow livid; in short, had he seen all the outward signs of the fierce emotions tearing that soft bosom, they could never have been forgotten.

An infuriated woman! is there a sight more distasteful to a man! The dignity, the gentleness, the modesty, all that which acts as a restraint upon his

rougher nature, and makes him offer a willing homage, thrown aside. Once, in such a case, is for ever. Forgiven, may be—forgotten, never.

Lucky was it for poor Cattie that the friendly shades of night hid her distorted face—her voice only betraying an overwhelming agitation. As she spoke those last words, "I never did, never shall love you," she flung herself headlong on the ground.

In silence de Jençay sat down on one of the many benches close at hand. Few of us find ready speech when we receive a great shock. It would have been impossible for him to say what he felt, for the situation was unique in his life. He was not thinking what to say or do—he was like a man who, fallen from some great height, tries and tries in vain to discover some landmark to guide him.

A furtive step forced him to take a decision. He looked round for Cattie, and could just distinguish that she was lying where she had thrown herself. He went to her, and without a word raised her placing her arm within his. Her passion had passed away, and left her so weak that she was forced to cling to her husband's arm to steady herself. Not a syllable passed the lips of either in that homeward walk.

They had scarcely entered the vestibule of the hotel before they heard their names pronounced by a cheery voice.

"So here you are at last," exclaimed the Duke following them up the stairs. "You have no time to lose—I have secured a box—'*Crispino e Comare*,' with Patti—allons—allons, Madame, just half an hour to make yourself beautiful." They were now in the lighted salon, and the Duke, catching sight of Cattie's face, exclaimed, "What a face of the other world!"

"I took her too long a walk," said de Jençay.

"Monster! but charming lady, you are not a baby without a will of your own. Why did you submit? A delightful opera forfeited for a damp walk in the dark—Pah!"

The Duke had exerted himself to get the box, and was disappointed as people are, when their wish to give pleasure fails.

"I do not mean to give up the opera—in a quarter of an hour I shall be ready—will you wait for me?"

"I am your slave."

When the Countess had left them alone, the Duke, after drumming on a table for a minute or so,

said soothingly to de Jençay, "It will be nothing my friend. This morning's storm has set all the women's nerves wrong—not one of them in good humour. I treat such disturbances as I used to do disagreeable paragraphs in the poor Duchess's letters—never take notice of them."

De Jençay gave an immediate practical illustration of the advice by making no answer to the Duke's observation. He turned the conversation on the various rumours afloat as to war.

Within the time she had said, Cattie returned, charmingly dressed and looking more brilliant than usual, from the feverish colour produced by agitation.

"Are you not coming with us?" asked the Duke of de Jençay.

"I must change my coat—I will join you later."

"Remember that the number of our box is 10;" and so saying, the Duke gave his arm to the Countess and led her away. She went without even a look to her husband.

During their drive to the theatre "l'homme leger," said "Confess yourself, dear lady; you have been naughty."

"Why do you not suspect your godson of being the one in fault."

The Duke gave a little significant shrug, and answered with an amiable brusquerie "You are a lovely, bewitching, dazzling creature—be good also, dear lady, that will complete the charm—goodness places an unfading aureole round a woman's head."

The Countess listened, astonished. Hitherto, she had believed him to be a man who looked for nothing, cared for nothing in women but their beauty and coquetry.

"That is it," he went on—"a pretty graceful woman *and* good. My faith, it's a perfection one rarely meets." As he said this, they reached the theatre.

Enthusiastic as she was about music and easily carried away by the excitement of the moment, Cattie in spite of the fascinations of Patti's singing and dancing remained absorbed in her own uncomfortable thoughts. What would be the consequence of her outbreak? For the first time in her life, she felt her will was mastered. Was it fear; or was it remorse, that was the cause of the dull heavy pain she was feeling?

On his side, de Jençay was endeavouring to bring light out of the darkness which had so suddenly fallen upon him. He was really puzzled. Why, after months of marriage, reproach him with a previous passing admiration for another? Accustomed to the mode in which marriages are arranged in his country, de Jençay could not understand Cattie's horror of uncle Dan's interference, even had it been more decided than it had. De Jençay was perfectly under the impression that he owed to accident alone having overheard uncle Dan's conversation with aunt Polly. He could see no excuse for her wanton declaration of want of affection for himself.

De Jençay paced the room in a vain endeavour to come to some conclusion as to what should be his future course of conduct with his wife. The matter could not rest as it was, and yet he loved her so tenderly, that he dreaded what a further explanation might bring forth. Were all his best and most legitimate hopes to be dashed to the ground? Were the domestic joys, the happy home, to which he had looked forward, to turn out mere illusions, vanishing as he put out his hand to grasp them? Was duty—arid duty—unsoftened by affection and sympathy, to

be his lot in the future as in the past? Was his honest love to become his punishment?

Immersed in such thoughts, de Jençay forgot that time was fleeting, and that he had agreed to join the Countess at the theatre. She, on the contrary, was noting each passing minute. When it came to the last scene, and still no appearance of her husband, her heart grew very full. Was it with grief or anger? No doubt, with both.

The Duke pretended not to perceive her emotion. What with his binocle and the applause he bestowed on the "diva," he managed to leave his companion pretty much undisturbed, and when men came to the box to bow and pay compliments, he talked so much that the only burden of dissimulation laid on the Countess was to smile, which women, from the beginning of the world, have managed to do, even when their hearts were breaking.

The Duke took Cattie home. She had been touched by his conduct all through the evening; in her present discomfort she clung to him as a sort of refuge. It was this feeling made her say as he bid her good night, "Come early to-morrow."

"Ah! these women, these women!" apostrophised

the Duke. "Never happy but when they make themselves and every one about them unhappy."

De Jençay heard his wife's light step on the stair, and opened the salon door.

Cattie did not allow to herself that she was afraid to meet her husband. She chose to think she was too angry to venture on speaking to him that night.

"I am very tired, and my head aches fearfully. I am going to bed directly. Good night." And without waiting his answer, she passed into the adjoining room. How her heart beat, how her hands trembled, just as though she had escaped some great danger.

She was up the next morning before de Jençay was awake, and before he was dressed she was already closeted with Madame d'Aiguillon.

Pride prevented Cattie from telling that lady the real cause of the yesterday's scene. She could not, and would not, have it supposed that de Jençay had been trapped into marrying. She owned to having had a dreadful quarrel with her husband, and that she had said what she had much better have left unsaid.

"I am very unhappy. Marriage is an awful

business. If girls only knew, they wouldn't be in such a hurry to get married."

"But what led to the quarrel? Is he jealous?"

"Jealous!" repeated Cattie; "how could he be, unless of the dear old Duke? But men and women can quarrel for other reasons. If I only knew what I had better do. I want to be advised."

"I have no silly curiosity," said Madame d'Aiguillon; "but without knowing something of the cause of the quarrel, how can I counsel you?"

"One thing I said was that I never had loved him, and never would."

"Are you quite sure of your indifference?" said Madame d'Aiguillon, repressing a smile. She had had so many experiences of such affairs.

"Quite sure," replied Cattie. "I believe it is worse than indifference."

"Have you never heard of love in hate?"

"No, and I don't believe in any such piebald feelings."

Madame d'Aiguillon said,—"Well, all I can do is to tell you how I would act myself. Don't return to the subject of your quarrel, whatever that may be; you will only make the matter worse. One word

leads to another, and on such occasions the more words the less chance of peace. Ward off any discussion to-day, and to-morrow he will find it more difficult to recur to the subject of your dispute. Gain time. Keep him at bay for a week, and you are safe. Men, my dear lady, have not our persistency. Let us go to the Murgthal to-day; we'll manage some other excursion for to-morrow. The Duke likes nothing better than pleasure-parties; he'll help you unconsciously. You are too young to be known to be at open variance with your husband. At your age there is only one motive assigned when monsieur goes one way, and madame the other. You will bring all his family down upon you. One thing more—do not mortify your husband publicly. As for the rest nobody will trouble their heads."

Cattie was thankful for the hope of a respite.

"Come back with me to breakfast, and settle about the Murgthal. He will not say anything disagreeable before you."

Madame d'Aiguillon laughed and said:—

"Oh, you little coward! you have much yet to learn. I will follow you as soon as I have changed my dress."

"I will wait for you," said Cattie.

Madame d'Aiguillon put her hands on the Countess's shoulders, and looking into her eyes, exclaimed:—

"Chère petite! what awful crime have you committed, to be so frightened to meet your husband?"

"I do not say I did right; but I will never own to him that I was wrong."

The moment de Jençay saw Madame d'Aiguillon he understood Cattie's tactics. He would have been pained to believe that she had confided, even to an old friend, what had passed at the Alte Schloss, but that she should have told Madame d'Aiguillon,—a woman whom she was aware he disliked,—that she should have discussed such a matter with an utter stranger, was as gall and wormwood to him.

Night's silent wings had brought him gentle feelings, and he had done what all generous, large natures do: sought to excuse the beloved offender, by doubting whether he might not be to blame; perhaps he could not judge of the finer susceptibilities of a young, proud woman; there were inherent differences between the feelings of men and women. He even found, in recalling Cattie's passionate words, reason

to doubt that he ought to consider them an offence. They allowed of an interpretation that had a right to indulgence, at least from him. Suppose they had their source from some little feminine jealousy,—could he resent that?

He was very far, indeed, from resentment when Cattie came in, accompanied by Madame d'Aiguillon. That sight put to flight his wish for reconciliation. This obstinate placing of an obstacle between them hardened and irritated him.

Before the uncomfortable breakfast was over the Duke appeared in more than his usual spirits. He had had his private cogitations ere he slept, and his bright face was the outward effect of inner benevolence. While his valet shaved him, the Duke had resolved to carry off de Jençay and Cattie to his château. "I shall take them to my sister: she shall put them in the right road. I am fond of that little Anglaise, with her proud ways. No; she would not shed a tear, nor beg pardon, though her heart was ready to break. How certain she was that she was deceiving me; and all the time she was dying to cry and beg me to help her. I like proud girls."

The Duke readily agreed to make one of the party to the Murgthal. He was sure this person and the other would gladly join them. "No; no family party."

The Duke chose his opportunity during the day to propose to Cattie that she and de Jençay should accompany him on his annual visit to his château.

"Plenty of riding for you, dear lady. You shall see a boar hunt. We'll manage to amuse you. Marie Thérèse" (his daughter) "shall come with her marmaille"—the term he gave his grandchildren. "You will like her: frank as the day, giving always more than she receives, loved wherever she goes: good wife, good mother, and an adorable daughter."

There was a glistening in the Duke's eyes that was very like tears. Cattie put her arm within his, saying:—

"I should be so glad to know Madame de Loisy. Persuade M. de Jençay to accept your invitation," she added. "You are really good."

"It is you who are good to overlook my imperfections, dear lady."

That evening de Jençay said to his wife:—

"The Duke tells me you would like to spend a

couple of weeks at his château, and I have accepted the invitation in your name and mine."

"Thank you;" and she was about to leave the room, when he said:—

"One instant more."

She stopped with her hand on the handle of the door.

"Do not be afraid, Cattie, of my resuming our painful conversation of yesterday, unless by your own desire. You, and you alone, can remedy the evil you have caused. Be assured of one thing, that whatever pain or grief I endure, it shall not weigh heavily on you. Though I would, I cannot take upon me all the suffering; justice follows alike on the ill we inflict, as on that to which we submit."

Cattie made no answer.

CHAPTER XI.

"TRA LIRA—TANTA-LIRA-LIRA."

A LONG, straight, poplar avenue leads to the Duke's château, a great white-faced building without any architectural pretensions save that of magnitude. The de Jençays were met by the Duke, looking larger and brighter than ever, his two grandchildren by his side. He welcomed them with his usual heartiness. Madame de R—— received them with that mixture of graceful reserve which, more or less, distinguishes persons accustomed to the atmosphere of Courts.

Madame de R—— was quite an old lady—upright and active in body and mind; taking so lively an interest in all the topics and events of the day that you would never have guessed her to be upwards of eighty. It was easier to believe that she had been

handsome, for even now her eyes often lighted up with the sparkle of youth. She was a devoted adherent of the elder branch of Bourbons, and as devoted to her Church. All through life her conduct had been a faithful transcript of these two faiths. The Duke, whose saint she was, had said to her, "You must break in that little Comtesse de Jençay. She has excellent points, but she wants taming. First she bewitched Armand, and now she treats him like a negro."

Cattie was charming with Madame de R——. We are, all of us, different creatures with different people; our very physique changes according to our surroundings. We expand mentally, morally, physically, in one atmosphere, and we close and shrink and fade in another. Nervous, sensitive people show this distinctly; but even the most phlegmatic do not escape the effects of repulsion or attraction.

The other guests staying in the château were M. de Loisy and his wife (the Duke's only daughter), an Englishman, a neighbour of M. de Loisy's in the south, whom the Duke introduced to Cattie as the "Capitaine Shackoulan," which meant Captain Jack Howland.

Madame Caroline de Loisy resembled her father: she had the same straightforward, firm expression of face; dark and high-coloured, of an unmistakeable southern type—one of those women with little talent, but a strong will and immense bodily activity. What she undertook she accomplished: devoted to her family, and without any worldly ambitions or vanity.

Her husband loved his wife and his little daughters; but to be perfectly happy he must have his pipe, Shackoulan's society, and potter about his property, learning all the gossip he could of great and small. Noble though he was, he had the tastes of one of his farmers, just as had George III. It would have been a marvel, thought Cattie, that Madame Caroline could put up with such a man; but to like him as she seemed to do, was saying little for the delicacy of her taste.

As for Mr. Howland, an ex-captain of Dragoons, you might disapprove or laugh at him; do, in short, anything but dislike him. He was a burly, short-necked man, with grisly hair, prominent eyes, a large crooked nose, and a button-hole mouth that turned in the opposite direction to the end of his nose. Yet with all these disadvantages, he was not plain: he

had the *vis comica* to a superlative degree: his most commonplace remark gave you an inclination to smile. He spoke French and Italian as well as he did English; he was a capital shot, that M. de Loisy vouched for; and as much at home in a yacht as in a barrack.

"Obliged to live abroad for my wife's health," he explained to Cattie. "She's been in bad health these twenty-one years,— long time, isn't it? You would not say she was an invalid to look at her. All her sisters are invalids, too. Bless you, she can't winter in England; so there we have been with india-rubber beds and sheets and pillows, and the Lord knows how many cushions and bottles all over Italy and Egypt and Algiers; and now, here we are, in the very southernmost corner of France, not so young as we were." (Here his eyebrows went up.) "And so we settle a little more, and we like orange trees and roses and myrtles. Very sad case."

Cattie did her best not to laugh.

One of Captain Howland's most agreeable qualities was that he never asked questions, but was satisfied to communicate. A high Tory of the old school—perhaps that was one of his attractions for

M. de Loisy: "Chartists, Radicals, reformers, innovators—try 'em and hang 'em." So said he.

"I'll tell you what I did," he continued, sotto voce, to Cattie, on the very first evening. "Our Vicar, you see, had a fancy for vestments—purple, and green, and pink. I got wind of it. I have a certain number of acres in his parish—d'ye see? I count for somebody there. Well, I just stuck myself at the vestry-door, and says I, 'You shan't make a merry-Andrew of yourself while Jack Howland's in the country.' 'You can't prevent me,' says he. 'Well,' says I, 'I will just try—the strongest gains the day—come on.' All the people, the ladies as fine as tulips, in their seats. 'Come on,' says I. 'This is the house of peace,' says he. And he went into the reading-desk, I promise you, like a lily of the field, that does not know how to spin. 'Pon my honour, he did."

Naturally, the conversation among these old-idead folks turned on Italy. Here again Jack Howland was in harmony with M. de Loisy, though the ground for their being so was different.

"What a mistake that unity," ejaculates the Captain, with an air of disgust. "Florence quite

spoiled! When the Grand Duke was there, why we got geese at half-a-paul a pound—just twopence—upon my honour. Now it is as dear as Paris."

The Duke and the Captain were indefatigable projectors of amusement. Both in strong health, and with high animal spirits, they required continual excitement and motion. Each day was marked by some festivity. Though the Château kept aloof from the great Government officials of the town, there were several families in the neighbourhood with whom they were on visiting terms. When the Duke and the de Loisys were in the country, it was the signal for a succession of dinner, hunting, and riding parties. Madame de Loisy, like her father, enjoyed society. She was, besides, a first-rate horsewoman, passionately fond of hunting, and accustomed from childhood to follow the dogs.

At first, Cattie only joined the riding and boating parties; but one evening de Jençay heard her say she should make one of the hunt on the next day. He went to her side, and said,—

"I beg you will not attempt it. It is rough work enough; and requires long habit to steer oneself safely through the woods."

"Of course, I am not such a centaur as Madame de Loisy; but I do not ride so badly as you suppose."

"You ride perfectly; but you have not the instinct of the woods as she has, who has been brought up among them."

"The sooner I begin to learn the better."

"But you know nothing of a boar-hunt—there is considerable danger for the inexperienced. I do beg of you to give up going."

"I am not the least afraid."

"Of course not," said Jack Howland, coming up. Adding, in English, "I like your spirit—don't be beaten by a Frenchwoman. You can leap?"

"Anything," was the ready answer.

"Then you'll do. Slack your bridle, forward—back—and over you go—lighter weight than Madame Caroline."

Cattie escaped from de Jençay, who saw that further remonstrance would be vain.

The hunt was a magnificent affair. All the neighbours were assembled, and every one, from the lowest to the highest, *en grande tenue*. Loud fanfares excited men, horses, and dogs.

When Cattie appeared in her close-fitting habit, showing the beauty of her slight figure, her long black feather sweeping low among her fair curls, with sparkling eyes and smiling lips, that general murmur, ever well understood by women, greeted her arrival.

"I'll take care of you," said Captain Jack, in English, as he looked to her girths and reins. He would have lifted her into the saddle, but de Jençay said:—

"Thank you, I always mount my wife."

The Captain put his hand on one side of his mouth, whispering to de Loisy,—"Jealous of old Jack: look at her," (nodding towards Cattie,) "isn't she a sight? See how her nostrils quiver like those of a thoroughbred, and what a colour in her cheeks, —she frightened! she'll go over a house if it comes in her way, or my name is not Jack Howland."

It was very pleasant as long as they were in the open ground, but Cattie's heart beat a little faster when it came to galloping through the woods. "Mind your head," warned honest Jack, as he kept in advance. On they tore. "Ditch!" shouted Jack.

De Jençay, who was by Cattie's side, said: "Don't attempt it for God's sake!"

She looked at him with a colourless face, and said sharply: "Do you think I care for my life?"

He made a snatch at her rein, she used her whip cruelly, and the spirited animal she was on sprung forward.

"By Gad,—she's done it!" shouted Jack, drawing up himself,—"oh! by the lord Harry, I thought she was done for;" and he took off his cap, and wiped the moisture from his brow.

Side by side, de Jençay and Cattie had taken the tremendous leap. "No luck for you to-day," she said, waving her whip triumphantly.

More fanfares, more horns, and baying, but neither husband nor wife were caring for the sport. The blood was boiling in Cattie's veins,—almost maddened by terror and passion, she urged her horse recklessly on.

They were nearing a wide stream, known to all the sportsmen of the country for the softness and steepness of its banks. De Jençay seized his wife's rein, she struck his wrist with her whip—he held firm. "You shall not do it," he said with closed teeth. There was a moment of passionate, mute struggle—both horses reared; de Jençay let himself

fall off, but never lost hold of her bridle, striving to force back her horse from the water. Once more she struck at his hand—this time he uttered some exclamation of pain. He saw her suddenly turn pale, her eyes closed for a second, then she said,—"Let go my bridle, I am going home."

The Captain coming in sight, de Jençay shouted to him,—"Will you take care of the Countess?"

"With the greatest of pleasures,—but where's your horse, Monsieur le Comte?"

"Taken leave of me, while I was assisting my wife; I must try and find him." De Jençay hurried away.

"No hurt, I hope?" said Jack, remarking Cattie's pallor, and that she was trembling in her saddle.

"None, thank you. M. de Jençay would *not* let me leap the water."

"I should think not, unless he wanted to get rid of you. Bless you! there's a story about some mad-brained countess who tried it and broke her back, and worried her husband all the rest of her life."

Long before they reached the Château, Cattie was scarcely able to sit her horse. She had to be assisted

up to her room, and no sooner did she get off her habit than she threw herself on a sofa, and in three minutes was fast asleep,—worn out by the excitement of her feelings. It was thus de Jençay found her when he returned an hour after. He stood contemplating her some five minutes—so slight, so fragile, so resolute, so passionate; with what force those small fingers had struck him his swollen, inflamed wrist showed.

He forgave the blow as he would have done one given by an angry child. He had made up his mind to bear internal discomfort, to renounce hope of domestic happiness, but he must now speak clearly and firmly. He would not submit to public disrespect. He had sought her now to say this in plain terms—to speak in the tone of a master. He had expected to find her defiant; the sight of her sleeping calmly took him by surprise, and, to be quite truthful, the graceful form, the sweet face, acted on him as peacemakers.

His gaze made her eyelids first tremble, then open—she reddened violently.

The discourse he had meant to address to her, like many other prepared discourses, went out of his

mind. "Will you let it be forget and forgive?" he said, and held out his unwounded hand to her. "You have been very naughty to-day—very naughty for a long time." He had better have stopped there, her hand was inclining to his; but he went on,—"I believe you have been suffering from a mistake—a complete mistake; it is that belief which has made me so patient."

"Thank you for your good intentions, but I really am not aware of labouring under any mistake."

"Have you, then, forgotten the scene in the old castle? of what you accused me?"

"Oh! of being in love with May—good little dawdling May; she would have suited you exactly. It is you who made the mistake."

She spoke in a quiet dry voice, but her eyes gleamed and her bosom heaved tumultuously.

"Nonsensical stuff!" he said, angrily. "You are playing away your own happiness, alienating my love."

She put up her lip as he spoke, saying,—

"I never thought men gave curtain lectures."

He rose and paced the room to recover his self-control. Standing before her, he said sternly,—

" I begin to think you have neither heart nor head, for your conduct shows as much want of feeling as of reason. You reject the only excuse which could make it pardonable. You had some motive for marrying me; if not for love, then it was for money. Supposing that you have what you bargained for, in common justice you should give some equivalent."

" Love cannot be bought."

" Certainly not, but having taken my name, you are bound to respect it; and, I warn you, I will not have it made a target for ridicule."

" I suppose you mean to insult me."

" Not at all. I mean to make you understand that I insist on your behaving so that the world may remain ignorant of our miserable interior. I have never been used to tenderness,"—his voice wavered a little,—" but I am accustomed to be respected."

Cattie fought with her good angel and banished him. Can it be believed that all this time she was longing to throw herself into her husband's arms, to ask his pardon, to caress his wounded wrist, and tell him that she loved him? Instead of which she said haughtily,—

"I will not be treated as a slave. Let us separate."

The world of passion is full of these contradictions. If there is a fatality which we cannot escape, it is that of our own character.

He hesitated, and had he been closer to his wife, he might have heard her heart-beats. She was terrified at her own suggestion.

"Not yet, at all events; not after six months of marriage. I must have some consideration for my family. I should imagine you would find it difficult to allege any complaints against me."

"Have the goodness to lay down your rules for my behaviour to you," she said.

"First, no renewal of the violence of to-day. I exact deference to my wishes, suavity of manner towards me in society. I exact neither in our tête-à-têtes. Propriety, the appearance of union, will make us both respected, and ward off many dangers from you."

"And if I do not play my part as well as you desire?"

"Then it will be time to take my decision." He was leaving the room; he turned back and said,

with a passion she had not believed him capable of, "Look to your conduct; you have lost the forgiving lover, you have now to do with the stern husband."

He was gone. Cattie had maintained till now her show of composure. The moment she was alone the tempest burst. She beat her breast, she struck her head. Oh, what a pain there was in breast and head. If she could only weep! but no, the tears would not come. And through all the storm of her passion there was a wailing voice, crying, "And we might have been so happy!"

Her brain was in a whirl; she foresaw the future, what it must and what it might have been. She lived years in that little quarter of an hour, but she could not bring down her proud spirit to retrace the false road, to turn again into the right one. In that moment she felt keenly what an immense space separated her from Cattie the bride. Looking back, one recollection after another rose like phantoms to press the truth on her that she had at that time held her husband's heart in her hand. How puerile the cause appeared for which she had thrown it away. In the new ideas crowding upon her, that former one vanished; above all rose the dread of isolation, to be

alone in life. She had been so blinded by her own mortified self-love, that she had never considered the consequences of irritating that of de Jençay. She had only thought of being loved herself; she had forgotten that another might have the same exigencies.

Curiously enough, some of Madame d'Aiguillon's confidences mingled with her thoughts. She turned from such a fate with horror.

But in Cattie's world there is not much time for reflection. Her maid came to warn her that there was a grand dinner, and only half-an-hour for dressing.

The salon was full when the Countess went in, leaning on her husband's arm. Every face turned towards them with a welcoming smile. Elderly people regard with the sort of involuntary tenderness they feel for little children a young husband and wife—they see in them either a representation of their own spring, of their own early happiness, or of their vanished illusions. They possess another kind of interest for the unmarried. To girls, they are objects of intense curiosity.

The late scene with de Jençay had subdued

Cattie's usual brightness. Perhaps for the first time in her life, she had that languid grace which touches the heart beyond any vivacity.

The dinner was like all dinners. Strangely enough, you bring together a set of people, all endowed with intelligence, well educated, and you get nothing from them but disconnected frivolous conversation, the foundation of it local gossip, which, after the withdrawal of the servants, is spiced by scandal. The only topic that roused Cattie was her neighbour on the right beginning to discuss Madame d'Aiguillon's last book.

The Legitimist gentleman was naturally severe on a writer who had adopted all the most advanced ideas of Liberalism. He discussed her opinions as though they had been so many personal insults.

"Strong-minded woman—very," said Jack. "She'll talk by the hour, as untired as that clever rebel Thiers himself. She has all the faults of all the kings of Europe at her fingers' ends. Mrs. Hatch-'em Patch-'em I call her," parenthesized the Captain, in English, to Cattie. "She's an invalid too" (this in French). "We met in Algiers. She was always poking about for information. I read her

letters on Algiers afterwards. How she gave it to the Archbishop about the little Arab children! 'The Governor,' says she, 'ought to bundle his reverence out of the colony.'"

Here the merry Captain was interrupted by a groan of horror from the major part of the guests. He had forgotten where he was.

"A woman who writes, sir," said Cattie's majestic neighbour, "a woman who writes loses caste" ("est déclassée" was his expression).

"Madame d'Aiguillon is a very charming lady-like person," said Cattie, warmly. "She is a great friend of mine."

Though de Jençay disliked Madame d'Aiguillon, he was pleased with his wife for defending her. Involuntarily she glanced towards her husband, expecting to see displeasure in his face. She coloured as she turned away from his admiring look.

In the course of the evening, Jack Howland took an opportunity of resuming the conversation about Madame d'Aiguillon.

"She takes a maternal interest in my son—Jack the younger—a great strapping lad of four-and-twenty. He hasn't much book-learning—born a

squire—rides—shoots—no one better. An open-hearted, open-handed fellow, the patron of beggars. It's always, send him *hauf-a-sovereign*. It's grand to hear how he says it. He is going to Paris this winter. Madame Hatch-'em Patch-'em says he must, in order to learn how to hold himself in a salon. I should be grateful if you would let him sometimes take a lesson in yours. He's a good boy—no vice in him—and somehow, I have a prejudice in favour of my own countrywomen."

Cattie said, kindly, "Indeed I shall be glad to see him; and very glad always to see you."

Jack said, "Thank you."

He was looking down at his very smart evening boots. He observed to three or four different people that evening, indicating Cattie,—"Charming creature! charming creature!" And to de Jençay himself he said,—"You *are* the luckiest fellow in the world. How she sings, and rides, and steps—and so gentle!"

CHAPTER XII.

AN OLD LADY OF THE COURT OF CHARLES X.

MADAME DE R—— watched her with curiosity and interest. There is no accounting for the liking that some very imperfect people excite; now the Duke and his sister thought Cattie faulty enough but their hearts warmed towards her.

"She is truthful," said the Duke.

Madame de R—— smiled. "On the contrary, a deceitful little puss; she loves Armand."

The Duke opened his big eyes very wide. "She treats him like a dog, I know she does," said he.

"That proves nothing, or rather everything."

"I wonder why women were made so incomprehensible," ejaculated the Duke.

"To interest men to guess the riddle," was the answer. "Let these two unconfessed lovers alone;

at present they are two instruments out of tune; but they will come to be in unison one of these days."

If Madame de R—— had come to this conclusion, it was more than Cattie had done. She comprehended herself less every day. Why was she so distraught? why, whatever she was doing, wherever she was, so restless and excited? Everything brought her suffering; she never read, nor gave herself to music or drawing—it all seemed so hollow, senseless. From her dressing-room windows there was a fine view of the ocean. Of an afternoon, when she went to dress for dinner, she would linger, watching the white-crested waves toppling over each other, sobbing and dashing themselves into spray on the beach; and in pretty contrast files of quiet cattle wending their way home over the hard yellow sands. She would think of another sea, another shore, and sigh, and wonder how it would all end.

After that boar-hunt she was more ill at ease than ever. She did poignantly regret her violence. Had not her husband's conduct, from the day she had told him she did not love him, been perfect? Not a reproach nor a complaint had passed his lips.

He had treated her with chivalrous deference alike when they were alone or in society. What was it that was always urging her even to insult him? How would it end? how must it end?

Everyone was charmed by her vivacity, her willingness to be pleased—none dreaming that Cattie's smiles were as much put on for society as her pretty dresses.

She addicted herself more and more to Madame de R——'s society.

One day, they were alone together, the elder lady in bed, and the younger pretending to work at the fashionable darning of net. Madame de R—— had been overfatigued by the dinner, and had not risen the next morning, and Cattie had asked permission to see her—a permission cheerfully accorded. "A trifle overdone in body, my dear Comtesse—no wonder at eighty-six—but I am quite able to talk, and enjoy your society. There, take my favourite chair in the window, and tell me what you think of my view on the sea and its far-off horizon."

"I am not fond of the sea," said Cattie, with a shiver, and coming to the side of the bed.

"And I love it in all its moods, whether it sobs or thunders on the beach, it has a language I understand; it reminds me of that great Power, who ruleth all nature, and brings good out of evil. That is a belief which has comforted me all through life, comforts me now, and makes me ready to go when I shall be called."

Cattie knew that this hopeful old lady had seen many bitter days. She had lost her only son in some obscure skirmish in la Vendée, whither he had accompanied the Duchesse de Berry; her husband had dissipated a large fortune, leaving her dependent on her brother; she had witnessed the downfall of the Bourbons, for whom she had a passionate loyalty; every one of her hopes had been blighted, and yet she was cheerful, encouraging, consoling, enlivening all with whom she came in contact.

In every part of the good lady's room were relics of the past. On either side of the chimney were two portraits, one of the son she had lost, and another of a lady in widow's weeds. "That was my Armand," she said, "he and his cousin, your husband, were both named after the Duke;

that other, Madame left me as a souvenir, when she went into exile." The female face was a very sweet one.

"I did not think the Duchesse de Berry had been so nice looking; I heard that she squinted."

"She was not pretty, but very winning; with a gracefulness which is more than beauty."

"Was the Duke fond of her?"

"Yes; they were a very friendly couple; he always showed her marked attention."

"I suppose that is all that princesses can hope for?"

"Royalty, dear lady, may control but does not vanquish human feelings. Queens suffer from the neglect of their husbands as much as ordinary women do, perhaps more; for their position debars them from asking or receiving sympathy."

"Sympathy is the thing of all others I detest. To be pitied would make me mad," said Cattie.

Madame de R—— looked up rather astonished at this vehemence. "You have no experience yet of suffering, dear Countess."

"More than you imagine, Madame; but tell me about the Court: how do they amuse them-

selves. Do they ever talk nonsense as other people do?"

"Quite so. I remember our all being more preoccupied with a masked ball, that Madame was to give than about the expedition to Spain. There were to be four quadrilles, French, Austrian, Spanish and Italian. I was to be the Princess des Ursins in black velvet covered with diamonds, Madame was to lend me her tiara. The Duke was to be my partner, Philip; but I never wore my dress."

"Why?"

"I took scarlet fever, and so I missed the ball, and not long after came the Duke de Berri's assassination. We had all considered the little Duchess merely as a delightful child up to that period; then she showed the courage latent in her, and her resignation was beautiful."

"You will think me very hard-hearted," said Cattie with a smile that was not joyous, "but I am not a believer in resignation. When people are resigned it is that they don't much care. I know I never should have a scrap if I met with such a misfortune; I mean if some one I loved were to die."

"But she did suffer, though she was both courageous and resigned."

"Oh! dear Madam; and she married again!"

"Yes, hearts revive as the year does."

Cattie shook her head. The old lady laid her thin wrinkled hand on Cattie's soft dimpled one.

"Do you see the contrast? when these rosy tipped fingers shall become like my claws, you will have learned the science of life, of which you are only beginning to spell the first words. You have some secret pain that you will not tell; it is common, you know, to suppose we have a malady, which a well-skilled physician assures you is a mere fancy."

For an instant Cattie was inclined to make a confession, or rather to pour out her griefs, but she shrunk from the effort. Madame de R—— might not believe her—understand her. Besides, when she thought of clothing her complaint against her husband in words, it sounded foolish. And then what did entirely close her heart was the dread of Madame de R—— inducing some declaration from de Jençay, which beforehand she knew she should not believe.

"So you have decided against making me your confessor," said Madame de R——, who had been studying Cattie's expressive face, and who had perceived the muscles tighten as they do when we take a resolution. "May I venture to explain to you why you shut up your trouble in your own bosom?"

Cattie answered "Yes."

"Because, though you already doubt you are right, you are not prepared to avow you are wrong. We may never meet again; my time here must be short; well, ma cherie, my eighty-six years have taught me this, that duty must be the rule, and affection the sweetener of our lives. There is a retributive justice in this world—we get what we give—if we make suffer, we shall be made to suffer. The one who loves most is happiest."

Cattie sat motionless awhile, then threw her arms round the old lady's neck and kissed her. Raising her head, she asked,—

"Was Charles X. a good or bad man? or was he only silly?" Seeing Madame de R——'s surprise, she added "Don't let us talk any more of me. Tell me, do you believe he plotted against Marie Antoinette?"

A deep flush overspread Madame de R.——'s face; her eyes emitted a flame. "A malicious falsehood, that I have often heard before. There never was a worthier man, nor a better-intentioned king. Those about him, who were not traitors, were obstinate, blinded retrogrades. He did not wish to sign those ordonnances; he was overpersuaded; besides, there was a clause in the charte, empowering him to do what he did. My poor country! the towns at the foot of Vesuvius are not more in danger of destruction than you are!"

"But everybody says France never was so prosperous."

What unlimited contempt Madame de R——'s face expressed.

"Prosperous! struggle within! menace without! a parvenu ruler—a parvenu court—all tail, no head. Prosperous! how can any country prosper, which lifts the sword against the Lord's anointed!"

Madame de R——'s passion was short lived, she said,—

"Excuse an old woman's warmth in the cause of the fallen."

"You almost convert me," answered Cattie.

"Be converted, my dear; night and morning I thank God that none of my blood have ever compromised themselves with any of these upstart Governments. Armand has, I know, different ideas from those of his kindred; he believes that the oppression exercised by the nobles, by his class, brought about all the horrors of our revolution. Nevertheless he has refrained from any act of desertion. I bless him, and he will be blessed for having respected the sentiments of his family."

The old lady, somewhat fatigued by the animation of the conversation, presently sunk into a light slumber.

Cattie went softly to the window, thinking how strangely her lot had been cast, comparing those days when she and her mother had been wanderers, so full of anxiety for the future—and the present, when she found herself the cherished guest, and relation of personages who had played their part in one of the greatest courts of Europe. How far away seemed those young days. Would she like to go back, be again the Cattie of Mayfield? Thought, with its lightning rapidity, brought before her Aunt Polly, establishing a comparison between Mrs. Johnson and Madame de R——. What

utterly different ideas governed the lives of the two! they were as unlike as might be the beings of different planets. At that instant Cattie recognized what a fundamental change had been effected in herself, how quickly she had become disused to her former mode of life. It was a curious study she had entered on. She recalled with a faint smile the anxieties and industries of the Sinclair girls and herself; what an important affair the arranging the winter and summer garments had been; how they had discussed the trimming of a bonnet; how vividly she recalled Uncle Dan's anger at her having cut his *Times* into a pattern, the source, she believed, of his dislike of her, and perhaps the first step towards her marriage.

She was roused from this comparing of notes by a sudden flash of lightning, followed by a clap of thunder and a sudden angry roaring of the sea. Without any respect for Madame de R——'s slumbers, Cattie rang the bell.

"Are the gentlemen come home?" she asked of the servant. No; they were not. To the next question the answer was,—"Yes, M. de Jençay had accompanied M. de Loisy and le Capitaine in the

boat, Madame de Loisy and the Duke were riding."

"I cannot see any boat," said Cattie to Madame de R——.

"They probably landed when they saw the likelihood of a storm."

"Where?"

Madame de R——, knowing that Cattie was ignorant of the localities, gave some name at random.

"I don't think you need be alarmed, dear lady."

"Oh! I never fancy evils." And Cattie, to show her indifference, went to the piano, beginning to play a waltz of Chopin. In a minute she stopped. "I have forgotten it, I must go and look for the music." She ran upstairs to the balcony outside of the rooms in the right-hand turret. There, regardless of rain and wind, and thunder and lightning, she stood striving to descry any boat labouring on the sea. At last she did catch sight of a black speck. Every time it disappeared in the trough of the waves, she uttered a cry, unheard in the wild tumult of the elements—a cry that was the utterance of remorse; it meant,—"Oh! if I had only never struck him; if he had forgiven me!"

The speck grew larger and larger: she could see figures in it. Just then she heard voices below. She distinguished first Captain Jack's loud tones; then she heard her husband and M. de Loisy giving orders. She must not be discovered as she was; it would be too absurd. Her late agony was merged in a dread of appearing ridiculously sentimental. She rushed away to her dressing-room, locking herself in.

Madame de R—— had got up to meet the gentlemen, who, as she had conjectured, had observed in time the threatening weather, and had landed in a little bay about a league distant from the château. They were wet to the skin, but the good lady was too eager a peacemaker to mind de Jençay's dripping coat.

"Go to her at once, she is upstairs; she has been half wild with terror." Seeing him hesitate, she added,—"On my word of honour."

De Jençay sought his wife, but the dressing-door was closed against him.

"I have come to say we are all safe," he called out.

"Very well," was all the answer he received.

CHAPTER XIII.

NO CHANGE FOR THE BETTER.

In the last week of November the de Jençays went to Paris. The Duke's château was near only to one of the minor railway stations, and the de Jençays found the coupé already occupied, and, indeed, no place to be had but in a carriage where there were a lady and a gentleman already seated, an English couple, their nationality visible at the first glance. The wife was lying, covered with shawls, full length on a sofa improvised by means of horse-bands and sticks, fitting between the two opposite seats. There was no imagination in her case. Her large bright eyes, her singular paleness, witnessed to the reality of suffering. She seemed much about Cattie's age.

With that naïveté which characterises British

travellers as to the French not understanding English, the lady said,—

"How tiresome! I hope no one else will come in."

"You shall not be disturbed, my darling," replied the husband, "I will pay at once for the extra seat." And then he busied himself with her shawls, doing so as a mere outward sign of anxious love, for they needed no arranging. She looked up at him smiling, and then turning her face towards his protecting arm, closed her eyes, and was soon again asleep. She must have been a pretty creature once, when her cheeks were rounder and less colourless; perhaps, though, not more interesting. She slept as confidingly as a child, giving the impression that even in slumber she was aware of the strong tender protection sheltering her.

Cattie fancied she saw in her countrywoman a likeness to May, and further fancied this was the reason of the interest with which her husband glanced towards the invalid. She felt sure that when he spoke to the guard he had given the man money to induce him not to put any other persons into their carriage. De Jençay had detected no

likeness to May, but his whole heart had gone out to greet this picture of pure conjugal union. In truth, he envied the husband.

When they reached Paris, the Count offered to assist the Englishman in lifting the invalid out of the carriage.

"Thank you," was the answer, in a courteous tone, and in good French; "but she is accustomed only to me. She says I am a tolerably clever nurse," and he smiled quite proudly.

I think Cattie on her side envied the wife, and would have given much to be so tenderly lifted, to have her head patted, and to have been spoken to by de Jençay in that voice, which strove to hide its lovingness under a semblance of joking.

This poor Countess of ours was on the road to discover that she had been playing with edged tools. Love is a dangerous foe, and a still more dangerous playfellow, for once affronted he rarely returns: and this was an idea and a fear that was beginning to take hold of the wife of Armand de Jençay.

That English couple recalled to her, by some curious association of ideas, Madame de R——'s

words,—"the matter is not to be loved, but to love; the one who loves most is the happiest." She was struck to the heart by the change of expression in de Jençay's face as he turned towards her, after a friendly leave taking of the English husband and wife. His eyes, as they met hers, lost the bright look of interest and respect with which they had rested on the gentle invalid—they appeared, when they rested on her, to dim and harden.

Cattie sat motionless in the carriage that took them to the Hotel de Jençay, situated in the Faubourg St. Germain, in which the Dowager had allotted to her son on his marriage the suite of apartments on the first floor. They were expected, and found everything prepared for their arrival, but there begun and ended her welcome. Her husband's indifference of look and manner wounded her to the quick. She submitted patiently to all Mlle. Francine's exigencies because her thoughts were elsewhere.

Montesquieu says, "Passion makes us feel but never see clearly;" and this was exactly Cattie's case. She did not, and never had yet understood the character of the man she had married. His undemonstrativeness was peculiarly irritating to one

of her eager temperament. She never guessed that, because he was sensitive, he was shy of expressing what he felt; that all his life he had been forced, by want of sympathy in those nearest to him in blood, to conceal his sentiments; that he was silent to avoid making society his confidant. How could she understand this quiet character, shrinking from struggle as from something degrading, when she was ready to fling herself against any obstacle at the risk of being dashed to atoms?

She had worked herself up to a high pitch of exasperation when she joined de Jençay in the dining-room. He met her flashing glances with a steadiness that discomposed her; she might look but could not speak while the servants were in the room. Immediately coffee had been served he left the room, saying, "I have letters to write."

What a wretched evening she passed!

At breakfast next morning he mentioned that he had heard from his mother, and from Yolande, speaking in the tone and with the manner he would have done to an acquaintance.

"I suppose I may invite Mademoiselle de Kerouanne to come and stay here with me," said Cattie.

"Certainly."

"She will be useful to us as a screen," she went on. De Jençay taking no notice of the innuendo, said,—

"Will you write to her, or shall I?"

"As you please," said Cattie; adding with a great effort to speak quietly, "we had better come to some understanding."

"I think that has become impossible, my poor friend; you prefer to peace and harmony disputes and violence, and that is a ground where I will not follow you? Whatever you desire within my power to accomplish shall be done. I shall always be ready to accompany you into the world, for in our unfortunate situation more than usual prudence will be requisite."

Cattie flushed, saying, "To hear you one would imagine I was not fit to be trusted."

"You have thrown away your trustiest shield—a young woman who does not love her husband is fair game to be run down."

"You are too cruel," and the tears started into her eyes, but she kept them from falling.

He rose from table, saying, "I do not mean

to be so. Let us avoid dangerous subjects. That we have come to this pass, you will allow was your doing." He went on with rising heat, "Do you suppose I am enjoying perfect felicity? Good God! and to know that you had it in your power to make me perfectly happy!" He hurried out of the room to hide his emotion from her.

Had he stayed another moment the passionate, wrong-headed Cattie would have thrown herself on his neck, and said, "Forgive me." Those last words of his had demolished the dyke she had so carefully contructed round her feelings; but he was gone, accepting her award.

At dinner he told her he had secured her a box for alternate weeks at the Opera, and the Italians, and he handed her a well-filled pocket-book. She did not thank him; she would have preferred to threw the pocket-book into the fire.

In a few days Yolande arrived, and her good-humoured unconsciousness of anything painful between her cousin and his wife greatly aided in keeping up appearances. After this, the life of the de Jençays was that of those of their class, who enter into the tumult of the gay world.

Madame d'Aiguillon was also in Paris, and she and Cattie became more and more intimate. There was that sympathy in their organisations which accounts for the attraction the one exercised over the other. Both had keen artistic tastes, and the elder woman had besides that attraction for those ignorant of life—the knowledge of evil. What histories of private life were recounted by the one, and eagerly listened to by the other! All these stories of passion luckily led but to one result with Cattie—they enlightened her as to her own private romance.

At Madame d'Aiguillon's house assembled artists, writers, musicians, among the most celebrated of Paris. There were few women in these réunions, but the few were chosen principally, it would have seemed, for their prettiness. This was another proof of Madame d'Aiguillon's penetration and experience. She knew that clever men decidedly prefer pretty women to talented ones. They naturally like better to be reverentially listened to, than having to argue and discuss with opponents whom it is no honour to defeat. Madame d'Aiguillon was far cleverer as a hostess than a writer. She

had that tact which brought out the talents of each of her guests; she knew how to say just enough to bring them to talk of themselves and of their productions, never obtruding her own claims. After having set the ball of conversation rolling, she would sit silent in her corner until it was necessary to give another tap with her magic wand.

Cattie was too intelligent also not to feel her own deficiencies in this atmosphere. Besides, the pain of her heart had subdued that impetuosity which had once made her rather seek than avoid rash encounters of wit. She was very popular at these soirées. Artists were glad to study her graceful attitudes, musicians enjoyed her voice, and poets involuntarily recited their verses with more spirit when they saw her eyes kindle at the lines which put into words some mute thoughts of her own.

Among the most ardent of her admirers was one who would assuredly never be able to write one line of poetry, though the poetical feelings of early manhood were swelling his heart. This was the son of "Shackoulan," Jack the younger—a great six-foot fellow, whose cheek had never blenched

before danger by sea or land, but whose healthy coloured cheeks paled when the Countess sung, or when, in remembrance of her promise to his father, she spoke kindly to him. Jack was one of those men whom women regard as they do a Newfoundland dog—they make them fetch and carry, and even occasionally pet them. They are pleased to think the great creature, who, if he chose, could rend them to pieces, is under the control of their little finger — men who must be contented with affection, for certainly they will never excite a passion: that sort of excitement is left to bilious-looking, unexpansive enigmas—such, for instance, as de Jençay.

It was Yolande who usually accompanied Cattie to Madame d'Aiguillon's; de Jençay and that lady were contending polarities, and never willingly met. Her soirées wearied him, and he probably thought that the grizzled heads which abounded in her salons did not need his surveillance. Young Jack at that time had not appeared on the scene.

It has been said over and over again that Paris is the place where one can best do without happiness. Yes; for those who have lived out their

hopes, and who only look to having their attention diverted from themselves. But Cattie did not find the saying verified. Wherever she went, whatever she was doing, she was ever restless, ever longing that the present hour, the present day, would pass. She had a vague imagining that some change must happen.

Yolande's devotion and admiration of Cattie withstood the wear and tear of daily caprice. She adopted all Madame Armand's views and opinions, change though they might twenty times a day. De Jençay present, Cattie was either silent or irritating, finding some fault in whatever he said or proposed. The moment he was out of sight, representing him to his cousin as a tyrant, disobliging and egotistical; and Yolande would sigh and agree that it was only too true—agreeing, also, the next half-hour, that he ought not to stay away hours, though considering his disagreeable qualities they ought to have been glad of his absence. The day that he chanced to dine out was one which would have tired the patience of any but Yolande. Even that unknowing innocent giantess came at last to consider it strange that Cattie should hold so to having this disagreeable husband of hers always at

hand. Yolande very nearly blundered on the idea that the charming Countess could neither be happy with or without her husband.

Another symptom of Cattie's malady was her continual questioning of Yolande as to de Jençay's bachelor days. In vain, however, she sought to obtain evidence against him, but Yolande could ununfortunately allege that he had undoubtedly, when he was very young, had an attachment to a bourgeoise, to his marriage with whom his mother would not consent.

"And what became of the beloved object?" asked Cattie, scornfully.

"She went into a convent—I believe she is in one in Paris; and I heard she would be the next abbess."

"Was she pretty?"

"Oh! beautiful, my aunt said."

"Fair or dark!"

"A brunette—quite a brunette."

"I suppose he took his disappointment as he does everything, very easily."

Yolande shook her head, then with a sudden flash of feminine instinct enlightening her, she added,—

"He was very little more than a boy at that time. Really I don't believe he would ever have married had he not met you. His mother used to get dreadfully angry, because he would not. She had given up all hope when he spoke to her about you."

"What did he say?"

"What I told you once before. He was very stern: he said, if my aunt refused her consent, he was resolved never to marry: that it was a chance for his happiness. I cannot remember the words, you know, but something about his being sure of your caring for him, and its not being a mere made-up affair between two mothers."

"Well, Yolande, I declare to you, upon my honour, that I cared no more for him than I did for you, whom I had never heard of. It was a blunder—a horrid blunder."

"Dear, dear; and he was so sure; and he used to talk to me, which he never did before, of how you would show, how much better English education was than French. He grew quite merry at that time. What a pity!"

"What's a pity?" asked Cattie sharply.

"That you cannot care for him. He is not so handsome nor so pleasant as the young Englishman; but if you tried just to see what *is* good in him—for he is not a bad man—and he might have been made wicked considering the way he has always been thwarted."

"Yolande!" here Cattie fixed her eyes solemnly upon the Giantess, "you are the best and greatest goose in the world, but don't *you* ever turn against me."

Yolande's eyes were full of tears in an instant. "I love you better than all the world. I shall hate Armand himself if he makes you unhappy."

"Then begin at once to hate him, for he makes me miserable."

For some weeks no incident broke the monotony of the lives of the de Jençay's. Cattie had her afternoon and evening receptions, she paid visits, drove to the Bois, went to balls, soirées, concerts, and theatres with the precision of an admirably regulated clock. She speedily learned the jargon current in her world; a jargon so admirably adapted to hide too great fulness or too great emptiness.

She would have gone the lengths of some of the young married women of her own standing, but though an apparently indifferent spectator of her doings, the instant she approached the verge of an indiscretion de Jançay's hand arrested her.

"You would make an admirable detective; why don't you offer to be Préfet de Police?" was her angry speech when he prevented her going to hear Theresa sing.

"Your affairs alone interest me," he replied. "It did not need much detective talent to discover your evening's plan. Your friend, Madame d'Erbillon, boasted to me, not an hour ago, that you were going together to l'Alcazar!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WORSE AND WORSE.

A YEAR of marriage was gone by, and spring had returned again, giving Paris a more decided air of festivity than ever. No matter where you walked you found lovely gardens or platbands, or flowering shrubs. And what care bestowed on them all. An army of men constantly battling with dust and drought in their behalf; and what a marvel it is to see those huge serpent-like hose playing harmlessly among carriages, horses, and foot passengers, avoiding all damage, save to the enemies they are sent to lay low. Hyde Park is a noble sight in the height of the season, a sight unrivalled but a few years ago. Now, take your stand either in a balcony near the Arc de l'Etoile, or sit under the trees in the Bois itself, and say if ever before you

witnessed such a gathering of equipages, and of such variety. For one great charm of this scene is, that you feel none are debarred from sharing in it. The humble hired one-horse basket, or the dingy cab may roll alongside a ducal landau, and the duchesse not turn up her nose at the bourgeois coming between the wind and her nobility, and the bourgeois, male or female, admire or quiz her grace and the other ladyships, often with a clear perception of what is good or bad taste. To walk or drive where they please is a liberty and equality the French insist on; if not, they have already paid pretty dearly for it; and they are ready to pay the same price again.

Well, then, behold the magnolias, and the lilacs, and laburnums perfuming the air all round the Palais de l'Industrie, and multitudes of carriages driving thither. This is the first day of the opening of the Salon, that is, of the Exhibition of Pictures. Madame Armand de Jençay had gone thither with Madame d'Aiguillon. The two ladies, of course, first sought the works of their artist acquaintances. As in their search they passed from room to room, Cattie saw her husband stand-

ing, as it were, lost in thought before a large picture. She drew Madame d'Aiguillon in that direction. The subject of the picture which had fixed de Jençay's attention was "The Taking of the Veil." The artist had chosen the moment when the novice stands before the altar in a bridal dress. By chance the girl had black eyes and hair. Cattie's imagination was a flame in a minute. She laid her hand heavily on her husband's arm, whispering, "recalling the past with regret, so do I!" and, without waiting a reply, she left him.

If Cattie could only have understood de Jençay's thoughts, the despair with which he contemplated his broken-up life, she must have bent her proud spirit. Nothing, nothing for him to cling to but hard dry duty, without any tangible compensation. Because she saw him sometimes smile, because she occasionally heard him speak cheerfully, because he seemed to appreciate the beauties of art and nature, she did not believe that she had disenchanted all things for him.

This May was to be a memorable month for Cattie. One morning Madame d'Aiguillon came to her in great agitation, her lips blue, her eyes sunk

in their orbits, looking suddenly aged. "Can you lend me some money?" she said, abruptly. "I must have ten thousand francs to-day."

"I have not the quarter of the sum," said Cattie; "but you can have that."

"As good as nothing. I have unfortunately put my name to a bill. If it is protested, I shall be ruined. God knows what may be the consequences if it were to reach M. d'Aiguillon."

"But Monsieur A., B., C.," suggested Cattie, naming some of Madame d'Aiguillon's most assiduous intimates.

"Impossible! impossible! They would think—No; there's no one I dare trust but you. Cannot you ask your husband? Say that your dressmaker has sent in your bill. You could desire her to do it."

"No. I cannot ask him for money on false pretences. Why may I not tell him the truth? With all his faults, he is very liberal."

Madame d'Aiguillon thought for a little, then said, "And Mademoiselle de Kerouanne?"

"Yolande? I am sure she cannot," said Cattie, still fancying Yolande dependent upon the de Jençays.

"If she would put her name on the bill it would do, for every one knows she is wealthy."

"Wealthy!" exclaimed Cattie, in utter astonishment.

"Good heavens! yes. How could you miss knowing it?"

"I did not know it; but if she can help, you may be sure she will."

"Go, and ask her at once, dear Countess; but swear her to secresy," said Madame d'Aiguillon, too really troubled not to speak to the point in the simplest phrase. "If she can let me have the money, it will be better than her endorsement."

Cattie went to Yolande, and told her, after receiving her promise not to divulge what she was going to hear, that she required a large sum of money to lend to a friend. Would Yolande lend it?

"Only say how much, my dear," said the giantess.

With a little trembling of her voice, Cattie named the sum.

"I will go and tell Armand to get it for me," said Yolande.

Cattie's face fell. "Wait till I know if that will do."

When Madame d'Aiguillon heard that de Jençay must be applied to, she said, "Is that big woman capable of holding her tongue?"

"For me, I believe she can and will do anything," was the reply.

"Then we must try her; but make her promise solemnly not to betray me to the Count."

"She cannot, as I have not mentioned your name."

"Thank you, thank you; but don't lose precious time."

Cattie returned to Yolande, who, without any demur or uneasiness, immediately went to de Jençay and stated her want of ten thousand francs as coolly as though she had asked for a couple of napoleons.

"My dear cousin, for what can you require such a sum?" inquired de Jençay, with a painful suspicion that Cattie must be, in some way or other, concerned in such a demand.

"I do not mean to tell you," was the straightforward answer.

"You are aware that you are asking for the whole of your next half-year's payment?"

"What does that signify? I want it all now."

"And you will not explain why?"

"No."

"And if I refuse to give it you?"

"I shall get it from some one else. Everybody knows I have money. I cannot see why you should hold back what is my own."

"Because I am afraid, my good Yolande, that you are being made a tool of; perhaps aiding in some unworthy deceit. What is right seldom clothes itself in mystery."

"Right or wrong, I want and must have the money," said Yolande; her singleness of purpose more difficult to deal with than any amount of diplomatic cunning.

Armand went to his desk, and wrote an order for the sum required, payable to Yolande. As he gave her the cheque, he said:—

"I shall do my utmost to come at the bottom of this business."

"You know as much as I do, my cousin," returned Yolande, as she seized the cheque.

When Cattie took it to Madame d'Aiguillon, that lady said:—

"Mademoiselle Kerouanne must get it cashed herself, and you, dear friend, will bring me the

money. Remember, unless I have it by four this afternoon, it will be too late."

When Yolande left de Jençay he rung for his man:—

"Are there any visitors with Madame le Comtesse?"

The valet was not aware of any; he would go and inquire. He returned to say,

"Yes, there was a lady who had not given her name."

At breakfast de Jençay said,—

"Who was your early visitor?"

"A person on business."

"May I beg to know her name?"

"I do not choose to say. I told you the other day you had better go into the police."

"You have a visitor. Yolande asks for a large sum of money, and point blank refuses explanation to one she has hitherto trusted as a brother. Can you wonder at my wishing to understand what all this means?"

"I give you my word it in no way concerns me," said Cattie.

"Then it no longer interests me," said de Jençay;

"but as I am sure what Yolande has done has been by your request, you must take care she does not suffer."

Touched by this confidence in her word, Cattie once again felt a longing to confess her sins and pray for pardon; but she was not now so sure that her confession or her prayer would be met with that forgiving tenderness of which she could have been confident six months ago. Had he not told her the lover was lost, and she had only to look to the stern husband? Ah! she was beginning to realise the immense space which separated the two characters. Reason was making it clear to her that she had sacrificed her happiness to a miserable egotistical pride. Had she had any remorse in marrying him without loving him? Why should she so resent his motive—based at all events on kindliness?—while hers—bury it, bury it, deep out of sight.

Cattie had never been one to yield openly—she had an unusual fund of resistance in her: it was this which now stood in her way. She would have been thankful to let de Jençay see to the very bottom of her heart, but to lay it bare of her own accord was beyond her strength.

At two in the afternoon the Countess and Mademoiselle de Kerouanne drove to Madame d'Aiguillon's door.

"I shall not go up," said Cattie. "You carry her the money,—but don't stop; say I am in a hurry."

The feeling of discomfort we all experience at the idea of meeting one who has brought us trouble, made Cattie unwilling to see Madame d'Aiguillon. Yolande was back in five minutes.

"I gave it into her own hands," she said. "I am glad of it; for, poor thing, she seemed in great distress." In the same breath the Giantess added, "I was not to let you forget that you wanted some fresh flowers for your hair this evening."

"Oh, that horrid ball!" ejaculated Cattie. "I am so sick of Paris. I shall be ill, if we do not get away."

"Let us go then. I am sure Armand will be glad, too; for he detests Paris."

At dinner, Yolande said:—

"Cattie is longing to go home."

"You mean, I suppose, to la Gonesse. She has only to name the day. Our stay in Paris depends on her pleasure," replied de Jençay.

"I will let you know to-morrow," replied Cattie.

This was one of those idle speeches which, through some after circumstance, assume a cruel importance. There really was no reason why Cattie should have deferred her answer until the next day. We often hesitate in taking a decision, for no reason save that we are surprised by being suddenly called on to do so.

That evening, accompanied by de Jençay, she went first to the opera; they were to go from thence to a ball at the English ambassador's. Never had the Count seen his wife so pensive, or rather so out of spirits, as on that occasion. Fond of music, as he knew her to be, and an enthusiastic admirer of Faure's acting and singing, he felt sure that she scarcely heard or saw what was passing on the stage. She had forgotten her company mask, and in the down droop of the lips and the circles round her eyes were signs of either physical or moral pain. Once attracted by his fixed gaze, she looked towards him, and flushed crimson.

"Are you well enough to go to the ball?" he asked.

"Perfectly, thank you. Is not that the dear Duke shooting us with his binocle?"

In the *entr' acte* the Duke came into their box.

"The lilies predominate over the roses this evening, dear lady," he said, seating himself opposite to Cattie. "Time to breathe a purer air. Why were you not at the Bois this afternoon? I believe the whole of Paris was there; no moving but at a foot pace. I stationed myself at the Rondpoint by the lake, and my opinion is that women have made a wager which of them shall be most preposterous."

"Men have always blamed women's dress; they have done so from the time of the Jewish prophets down to the present moment," said Cattie.

"Yes. I fancy mother Eve has been the least addicted to millinery of all her sex. But when do you leave, fair lady?"

"The day is not fixed, but soon."

"I shall see you to-morrow, so sans adieu;" and as the curtain rose, the Duke returned to his orchestra stall.

It was somewhere near eleven when the de Jençays left the Rue Lepeletier for the British Embassy. The rooms were at their fullest when

they arrived. The crowd of fashionable men thronging the anteroom drew aside, as they always do when some reigning sovereign of beauty makes her appearance, and Monsieur and Madame de Jençay were able to make their way to the fair hostess.

Cattie was immediately surrounded with petitioner after petitioner for quadrilles and waltzes. Among those unable to reach her was tall young Jack—his impatience so unrestrained that de Jençay noticed it.

Cattie was borne off. It was just possible for an attentive onlooker to catch a sight of her flashing past in the whirling circle of dancers. Several men, with more or less piteous miens, were grouped about. They were all grave husbands, in attendance on dancing wives. Leaves on the same tree are more dissimilar than balls; see one, and you have seen all. Brilliant lights in one place, softened radiance in another; velvet, satin, gauze, flowers, jewels, embroidered coats, and black ones, bands of music, buffets, and couples spinning like tops, or languidly moving through a quadrille, and that is a ball.

When a ball does become exciting is when two individuals meet who can meet nowhere else. People who do not dance often discover these happy couples;

de Jençay was one of those spectators this evening. By what we call the merest chance his eye was on Cattie and on Jack the tall, as they were about to join the waltzers. He watched Jack bending low to whisper to her, and then he also distinctly saw the young man slip something into her hand as she was about to place it on his shoulder. The act was swift and dexterous, but de Jençay had detected it. He never lost sight of them; and his second discovery was that Cattie, while pretending to arrange her bouquet, had put what she had received into her left hand glove. Suddenly her saying that she would decide *to-morrow* when she would return to la Gonesse flashed into his mind, and he connected Jack's action and that intended decision.

Cattie was standing to recover breath, for Jack was a powerful waltzer, when she was startled by de Jençay saying, "As this is your last ball, grant me a turn," and, without waiting her reply, she found his arm round her waist, her hand in his, and herself whirling more rapidly than even with Jack. Had de Jençay been seized with a sudden madness. Never had she seen him dance, or speak as if he had ever done so. At the end of five

minutes, when they were near a door of egress, he said, "We will go home," and, still holding her left hand, he led her away. He threw her cloak round her, without ever losing his hold. As soon as they were in the carriage, she said,—

"There is no necessity for holding me prisoner. You know that I have a paper in my glove; I have no intention to destroy it until I shall know the contents."

"Or until I do so also," he rejoined.

"That depends," she replied.

"Take care what you do," he said. "Upon the next few minutes depends whether or not we part for ever;" and he released her hand.

Not another word passed between them during the long drive from the Rue Faubourg St. Honoré and the Hotel de Jençay—not a word till they were in her dressing-room.

Cattie flung her cloak on a sofa, unbuttoned, drew off her glove, and held the tiny roll of paper between her finger and thumb.

"I do not know the contents, whatever they may be, it is not my secret. Now, if you doubt my word, if you read one line, I swear to you, *I* will leave *you* for ever more—threat for threat."

All the pent-up passion and exasperation of weeks had found utterance in these words. She *would* come to some conclusion, cost what it might—she would *not* endure any longer this mute state of enmity.

De Jençay's also long-suppressed feelings burst forth in this single sentence, "I can bear no more," he said; and turning on his heel, he left the room.

Cattie had nerved herself for a violent scene for anger—explanation—ah! yes—and for reconciliation, but not for this sudden renunciation. "I can bear no more, I can bear no more," she went on repeating his last words as if they had taken away her reason. At last she rung the bell: "Francine," to her maid, "go and tell M. de Jençay I want to speak to him—I am ill."

Mademoiselle Francine came back with a very important face.

"Well!"

"Monsieur le Comte is not at home."

"Get my clothes off, and put me into bed—call Yolande."

CHAPTER XV.

WITHIN AN ACE.

With hard tearless sobs Cattie related to Yolande what had happened.

"It was only a note from Madame d'Aiguillon—I have not an idea what is in it. Something I suppose about the money, for that great stupid young man said no one was to know the contents. I got in a passion, I always do now with de Jençay, I can't help it—he speaks so coldly, as if he were master, and I can't stand it—he knows I can't, and he does it on purpose to drive me wild." Then with a new burst of sobs. "Oh! what shall I do—what am I to do?"

"I'll go and bring him back," said the Giantess soothingly.

"But where is he? If I only knew—so senseless

to go away in that manner. Hold me, Yolande—the room is going round—I am dying—he is all wrong—I do love;" and Cattie fainted away for the first time in her life. It was what people call a dead faint; and assuredly Cattie will never look more death-like when her summons comes.

Yolande and Francine were terrified out of their wits. They clapped her hands—and burned the end of a pen under the poor thing's nose—quite in vain. So at last they sent for a doctor—any doctor, the first at hand, and providentially they caught a sensible man. "The syncope," he said, "proceeded from mere exhaustion—Madame had probably danced too much" (all the débris of a ball toilette were lying in sight) "and eaten too little."

Esculapius had guessed rightly. Madame d'Aiguillon and de Jençay had effectually taken away Cattie's appetite the day before, she had fainted from want of food and excessive excitement. The suffering of the body, calmed for a little the suffering of the mind; but as food and repose restored the former, so soon did the travail of the latter recommence. Nothing would induce the Countess to remain in bed. She was not going to appear as if she were trying to excite

de Jençay's pity. She must see the Duke. He was sent for, and orders given that nobody else should be admitted.

"Madame, jai l'honneur de vous présenter mes hommages," said the Duke coming into the boudoir with his usual air of "un homme à succès."

To his amazement, the Countess burst into tears.

"Eh! Eh! Eh! my poor lady—what is it then —what is it?" The Duke had the voice and the size of an ogre, but the seeing a woman in tears, reduced him to the condition of an ignominious foe for Tom Thumb. "What's wrong?" he asked in a quite gentle tone—patting the cold hand of his godson's wife.

"Armand is gone," and her under lip fell just as that of a child who is trying not to cry.

"Diable! what has taken him away?"

"We have quarrelled."

The Duke shook his head. "Bad habit. The best thing you can do is to run after him, and kiss— and be friends."

"I don't know where he is—and it is not only now—and perhaps he will never make it up."

"God bless me! With your blue eyes and white skin, who could believe you to be such a little demon? But, dear lady, you must go to your husband, unless you can make him come to you. These sort of differences should not be allowed to get wind —he must hear reason. We can't have all Paris inventing stories to account for your domestic squabbles—*le diable y met toujours la queue.* They'll make out—well, never mind what—we must not let them have the opportunity. Begin by giving immediate orders to prepare for your return to la Gonesse."

"But, if Armand is there, and won't receive me?"

"But no—but no—he will do no such thing—he *must* do no such thing. He *must* keep his own secret. I did, for more years than he counts. Ah! Madame Cattie, your sex are pretty tigresses. You move so softly, so gracefully, and then comes a little claw here, and then there; and when you see the blood you have drawn, you faint, and swear you adore us; and we are bound to soothe and kiss your feet, and say, that to be told you love us, makes up for all. It is not good logic, dear lady. Men are bad enough, inconstant, profligate,—everything you will;

but one thing they don't do. When they love a woman, they do not show their love by ill usage. They only ill use a woman when they are either indifferent or tired of her. I am sorry for you, silly child—inward wounds do not heal easily."

"Why do you say all this to me now? My heart is breaking—it hurts me horribly," and she pressed her hand on her side. "Yes. I have been very, very foolish; but, if I had not loved him, I should not have behaved so ill."

"Exactly," said the Duke, with a slow shake of the head.

"I was angry, for I found out he had asked me to marry him because he thought I loved him."

"Would you have had him do so because he thought you did not love him?"

This view of the case had not presented itself to Cattie; but she had a true feminine tenacity. She answered,—

"No woman likes to be taken out of pity."

"No; you prefer to take men out of pity. Mon Dieu! as if any man, young or old, could help worshipping such a syren as you, once he believed you had a grain of liking for himself! You could

turn any masculine head. And as to who likes first, who can ever tell? And what does it matter so that both love well?"

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" cried Cattie, in a new access of despair.

"I told you—go to la Gonesse. I have not a doubt that your husband is there. Whether or not, the world will believe you have gone to join him. Write to him, addressed there, by to-day's post, and beg his pardon."

Cattie now mentioned the incident of the note.

"And it really is from Madame d'Aiguillon? Ah—pardon me," as he met her look of hot indignation.

"I have not opened it," she said. "There it lies, where I threw it last night."

"Ready for your femme-de-chambre; but not for your husband. Well, read it now before me. You may want advice, or a witness—heaven knows what."

"If Armand could ever believe——"

The Duke interrupted her.

"Ta, ta, ta! Of course he could, and would, and should believe his own eyes. A strapping fellow, an Englishman, a born enemy, gives a man's wife a

note clandestinely, and she refuses to show it to her husband. Do you take de Jençay for a stick, a stone, a fish ?"

"I had given my promise."

"Never give promises. You are married. You ought not to have secrets, particularly with young men."

"It was not with a young man."

"Pray, Madame la Comtesse, if you saw your husband receive a note from a lady of any age between sixteen and sixty, and forthwith hide it in his glove, and refuse to show it to you—eh, what would you think? what would you say? I should like just to hear."

"That's quite a different matter."

"Exactly. Well, read this blessed note."

"Hum!" was the interrogative sound, by which the Duke inferred, "Well, what do you think now?"

"So stupid!" exclaimed Cattie.

"I thought so. Madame d'Aiguillon is not the woman to trust any human being with a line in her writing that could compromise her. May I ask what she did write?"

Cattie held the scrap of paper towards him.

He burst out laughing as he read aloud,—

"'Merci, bien chère amie. Je vais tout à fait bien.

"'Toute à vous,

"'CLEMENCE D'AIGUILLON.'

Brava! brava! Was there ever so small a cause for so much mischief? Enclose the note to Armand, I beg."

"But I understand what it means, and he will guess that I do."

"And what does it mean?"

"That's just the trouble. I cannot give any explanation without Madame d'Aiguillon's permission."

"She *must* give the permission. I should like to teach that young Shack a lesson as to giving billets-doux to ladies before a thousand curious pairs of eyes."

"But it is not a billet-doux," flashed out Cattie.

"I see it is not, but those who only saw it given and have not read the contents? ah, ma chère, we must take care of appearances of wrong doing. Many

a woman has compromised herself by neglecting to do so."

"Are you going?" asked Cattie, anxiously.

"Yes, dear lady; I have some business of my own. I will see you to-morrow. In the meantime write to Armand, he is not such a weak fool as I was, write and confess."

So saying, the Duke made a hasty retreat, but hasty or not, always with the same air of a courtier bidding farewell to a royalty. He was resolved to arrange this matter, and to do so *tambour battant.*

Only one thing had the power seriously to annoy the Duke, or to make him lower his flag, and that was the world's dread tongue. He had said, with perfect truth, that for more than thirty years he had submitted to daily torture, of that sort which consists in the constant falling of a drop of water on the head, and he had endured this rather than give himself and his domestic troubles to be a public spectacle. He was now prompted to interfere first, because the de Jençays were nearly related to him, belonged to his class, and were members of that remnant of Royalists who identified their own respectability with that of the cause they upheld. The

Duke had also an affection for de Jençay, who had played round his knees, esteeming him perhaps even more than he liked him; just the contrary of his sentiments for Cattie, who attracted him, queerly enough, by reminding him of his Duchesse. That silly person had been the one passion of his life. For all these reasons combined, but principally from the downright goodness of his heart, he was resolved to reconcile these young people.

The pressing business he had pleaded to Cattie was to see Madame d'Aiguillon. In very courteous guarded phrases he gave that clever lady nevertheless distinctly to understand that at all risks the mystery of the note of the evening before must be cleared up. Her quick-witted messenger,—he congratulated her in a parenthesis, on the choice she had made,—had so cleverly managed the delivery of her message, as to give it a very unpleasant colour in de Jençay's eyes, and the dear Comtess, a slave to her word, had refused the explanation necessary for conjugal peace. Now he, the Duke, never doubting Madame d'Aiguillon's generosity, greatness of heart, readiness for self-sacrifice, devotion to her friends, (if his *seigneurie* could have called to mind any other per-

fections he would have attributed them to the lady he was speaking to); never doubting all these qualities, he entreated her to release Madame Cattie from her promise of secresy. "Poor little woman!" he concluded; "she is breaking her heart. She adores her husband."

"Ah! she never told me that. I should not have guessed it."

"Not guessed it! Ah, madame, with your supernatural powers of penetration, your knowledge of the human heart, you had not guessed *that!*"

Madame d'Aiguillon smiled.

"Monsieur le Duc, finding my moral nature insensible, directs his battery against my vanity as author."

"As you will; but, chère dame, take pity on these foolish children, help us to avoid a scandal."

"I have a weakness for your Madame Cattie. She has more manly regard for truth than the generality of women. She wont lie to save her life. She is proud . . . "

"Oh, as to that, infernally so!" said the Duke, *sotto voce.*

"And," went on Madame d'Aiguillon, "she

stands by her friends when they want her. I don't consider the Count as a man capable of developing her good qualities. He evidently expects to be himself taken on trust, afraid lest any expansion or manifestation of his feelings should lower his dignity, prefers to wrap his mantle round him, and to hide his pleasure or his pain, that no one can take part in either. He makes me always think of a person who looks at his-fellow creatures through the wrong end of the telescope. Had you assured me his wife hated him,—I should if I were her,—I should have thought it quite natural."

"What would you have? It's one of the amiable inconsistencies of your adorable sex to love unreasonably."

"You and I ought to be friends, Monsieur le Duc."

"On account of the unreasonableness of such an alliance? However, let us try."

"Give me the opportunity," urged the lady.

"With transport."

"You hypocrite! I pity the woman or women who ever placed their affections on you."

"Ah, dear lady, when I had once known what it was to be loved!—ma foi, I never wished to

repeat the experiment"—he caught himself up,—"*till now.*"

"You forget Monsieur d'Aiguillon."

"True; but we may entertain a platonic attachment," and he gallantly kissed Madame's hand.

"I see you are determined to make me sacrifice myself," she said.

"I see that you are resolved to do so," he returned.

"But how?"

"You alone can tell."

She turned to her desk and wrote a few lines:—

"There, give that to the turtle-doves."

"Do you permit me to read what you have written?"

"Well, yes; you are too preux chevalier to divulge a woman's secret."

The Duke laying his hand where he supposed his heart to be, opened the paper and read:—

"DEAR COMTESSE,

"You may own to your husband that the money you induced Mdlle. de K—— to lend, was for me, and that my note was to assure you that I

had arranged the affair. First I did one stupidity, and to remedy that, committed a second—applied for help to a woman in love with her husband.

"For the future, your wiser

"CLEMENCE D'AIGUILLON."

"Admirable!" exclaimed the Duke. "See what it is to have two ideas in a head. Killing two birds with one stone in the most elegant manner." Again he kissed Madame d'Aiguillon's hand and retreated from her presence with the grace peculiarly his own.

He placed Madame d'Aiguillon's note in an envelope, sealed it with his ducal seal,—having quarterings enough to have satisfied any German M. C.,—and sent it to the Comtesse. The Duke carried his caution not to excite attention, so far, as not twice to call at the Hotel de Jençay in one day during the Count's absence.

In the interim, Cattie had given orders to have everything prepared for her going to la Gonesse the next day.

Once only did the Giantess make any observation on what was passing, and that was to say, "If I

were you, dear cousin, I would leave Armand to get out of his sulks" (*bouderie* is the prettier French word,) "you are going to spoil him."

"Oh, my dear Yolande! till now I have never tried to do what I should, and you would dissuade me from beginning. When will you open your eyes?"

The Giantess obeyed the last injunction very literally, but saw not a whit the clearer.

When Cattie received Madame d'Aiguillon's second note, she believed that all her troubles would soon be at an end. Armand would confess that he also had been wrong. She would then ask his pardon, and promise (oh! that she would) to be kind and good, to make his life happy. Had he not once said that she could do so if she would? Well, she would; and—yes—he should see into her heart, even though she had always heard it said it was not safe to let a man know how much he was loved. With happier reveries than had perhaps ever been hers, she lay awake half that night. However easy Cattie found it to make peace with her conscience, she was to be forced to learn that there is no escape from the punishment of evil acts. "The labourer is worthy

of his hire," stands valid for our good or bad labour.

Towards morning she had just fallen asleep when she was startled by Francine's voice, saying, "Monsieur le Curé, from la Gonesse, was in the dining-room, very anxious to see Madame la Comtesse."

Cattie jumped out of bed. Nothing but a misfortune could have brought her such a visit at such an hour. De Jençay was dead; he had been killed in a duel, or he had killed himself, and it was her doing.

With the shivering calm of despair she let Francine dress her; an operation the femme de chambre performed for the first time in her career in an unbroken silence. She felt that there was trouble, and heaven alone knew of what kind. Of what enormity could Madame have been guilty, to send away her husband, and bring M. le Curé? was a question so busying Francine's brain as to stop her active little tongue. Cattie only spoke once—when she refused a peignoir and asked for a walking dress.

In the huge dining-room, lofty in proportion to its breadth and length, was the Curé, looking shorter than ever by comparison. He had that unkempt look

which belongs to travellers by night. His chin was blue as Blue Beard's, and the red of his cheeks was toned down to a dingy purple. His whole air was limp.

As soon as the Countess entered, he began an elaborate apology for disturbing her at so unseemly an hour.

"Tell me at once why you have come," she said, impatiently.

"I have brought a letter from Monsieur le Comte . . . ."

She snatched it out of his hands, tore it open with the fierce haste that belongs to love or hate, and read as follows:—

"You understand the necessity of some communication between us; that, in fact, after the late occurrence, we must come to some solution of our situation.

"Some months ago you said we had better separate, and I drew back from the proposal. It is now my turn to say that it will be the only wise thing for us, if we wish to preserve our self-respect. Of all things abhorrent to my nature, it is violence in a

woman; and, alas! to that you have more than once resorted, in the quarrels you have forced on me.

"It is only by what we can accomplish that we learn our own powers. I have failed in all my efforts to make you happy, even contented. My character tries your patience. I regret it. But characters are neither formed by sudden explosions, nor do they change from day to day. It is the sense that what I am I shall remain, which fortifies me in my present resolution. The very sight of me irritates you. You are too impatient, too thorough in all your feelings, to bear your disappointment quietly. I can do nothing else for you than relieve you of my presence. Perhaps, when you have measured yourself with the difficulties of life, you will be less exacting; you will grow more indulgent; you will learn to pardon me for not being the hero of perfection you had dreamed of.

"I confess I was too hasty the other evening. It is the last pound that breaks the camel's back; the last drop that makes the glass overflow. I have been wretched for months, and because I have made no moan, you closed your eyes to my suffering. I leave you, then; not because I doubt your prudence,

but to give us both time to recover our tranquillity, to give us both time for reflection.

"You are young to be left alone; but I wish to give you this proof of confidence, to make amends for the appearance of suspicion with which you were justly offended. I go, because I said truly, 'I can bear no more.' I trust you to yourself, leaving you the honour of my name as a sacred deposit. I have written to beg the Duke to take the place of a father to you: you will apply to him in any difficulty. As for pecuniary arrangements, you will find a credit at my banker's for a hundred thousand francs per annum. You will have la Gonesse and the apartment in Paris as residences. I make no restrictions; but it would please me did you avoid all watering-places. It is there that the protection of a husband is more than ever necessary. Let Yolande remain with you. In the first instance I go to my mother;—she must be made to understand our situation. After that, I shall probably go——Heaven knows where! God keep you.

"ARMAND DE JENÇAY."

It seemed as if Cattie read the letter at a glance.

"Is he gone?" she asked; every feature convulsed with the effort to form the words.

"Not yet, Madame. Monsieur le Comte charged me to bring that letter to you to-morrow. Pauvre chère, Madame," added the little man, taking her hand, his eyes glistening like two black beads, with the tears standing in them. "Courage, chère Madame; I took the midnight train that Madame might have more time."

Even if de Jençay had surrounded the situation with secresy, priests have the instinctive penetration of women, and the Curé had jumped to the conclusion of a quarrel between Monsieur and Madame, which might perhaps be made up if they met. The jolly little man had small faith in letters as peacemakers, and a great belief in the power of a loved voice,—so off he had come to Paris.

"What can I do?" asked Cattie, downstricken.

"If Madame could reach la Gonesse to-day."

"I am ready. Let us go. Come,—come at once."

She rang the bell.

"I am going home with Monsieur le Curé. Fetch a coach. No, no; not the carriage. Quick."

"But Madame must have some breakfast," expostulated Francine.

"Nonsense; I don't want any."

"But Monsieur le Curé must eat something,"—making significant signs to the priest to accept the offer.

"A cup of coffee and a crust of bread, mademoiselle," he said, in obedience to the signals.

"A cup of coffee and a crust of bread," repeated the Countess mechanically.

They did succeed in making her swallow some mouthfuls.

"We shall be too late. I know we shall."

And she hurried them away, saying they would go and meet the coach.

"Madame la Comtesse est malade," explained the Curé to the guard, as a reason for asking for a compartment to themselves.

"There are always so many ladies ill," muttered the official, but he pocketed the fee, and granted the request.

It was not till the train was in motion that any one remembered the Giantess. And it was only Francine who exclaimed, "*Tiens!* et Mademoiselle de Kerouanne."

Cattie made an impatient gesture, but it had no reference to poor Yolande. "How slow this train is!" she exclaimed; and yet it was the express, which at times seemed actually leaping forward. How the poor thing's hands worked; never still an instant. How she kept looking at her watch. She asked twenty times—nay, nearer fifty times—"You don't think he will be gone." And the Curé, with never-varying patience, would reply, "I trust in God Monsieur le Comte has not changed his plans. He was not to leave before this evening."

Cattie's former kindness to the good little parish priest, like bread thrown on the waters, was now returning to her.

All of a sudden a horrible idea seized on the Countess.

"He will hear you are gone, and he will leave the sooner to avoid me."

But the most innocent of priests was not without some of the guile of the serpent.

"That is not likely. I swore Brigitte on the Gospels to keep my going secret; to make any excuse her wit or natural propensity to lying could invent; and I shall be back for the *salut*."

The reader must remember that it was May—the month of Mary—when there is service every evening.

Presently the rumbling tick, tick, tack—tick, tick, tack—of the engine began to take effect on Cattie's nerves. It seemed to her as if she heard the pealing notes of a great organ—only four notes—and in and out among them jostled the Duke's words of the day before, just as she had often heard in Catholic churches the priest's voice now mingling, now rising above, now overpowered by the accompanying music: "You torture us, and we must be happy and satisfied, if you only say you love us. It is not good logic, madame." Pell mell, backwards and forwards, always the same four notes, and always the same burden. With a cry of impatience she exclaimed, "If that sound goes on, it will drive me mad."

Francine could not hear any particular noise.

"Madame was feverish,—it was all the not having taken any breakfast."

"I see the church tower of St. Blaize," announced the Curé, at the end of the fourth hour.

"Find a carriage at once; say I must have four horses, Monsieur le Curé."

Luckily as they reached the station, there was

a hired carriage bringing passengers for the train. The Curé at once secured it.

"The horses are strong and fresh, Madame; and we shall lose time by waiting for a second pair."

The worn-out Cattie yielded, saying,—

"Promise him any money if he will drive fast."

Once in the carriage she covered her head and face with a shawl, and lay back motionless. She was feeling too keenly for any regular thinking; in fact her whole being was merged in one great desire, to see her husband. She did not go beyond that.

On the road they met one of the Count's servants on horseback.

"Is Monsieur le Comte at home," shouted the Curé.

"Surely, Monsieur le Curé," shouted back the man.

"Poor dear Madame," muttered the Curé, as he saw the mnffled form in front of him quiver as with an electric shock.

At the loud resounding tread of the horses over the bridge and under the old archway, Cattie sat up, threw off her coverings, and said,—

"Go and tell him."

"Ah! true, true!" and in another instant the

round little figure, the soutane and sash flying indecorously, first to this side and then to that, rushed across the great entrance court. "Madame is coming—Madame is here! Oh, monsieur! Madame is half dead!"

That was how the Curé announced his wife's arrival to de Jençay; who, hearing the unexpected sound of wheels, had come out to the *perron*.

"You must go to her, Monsieur le Comte," continued the Curé, urging his injunction by laying a hand on de Jençay's arm. "Pauvre chère dame—pauvre chère dame." The tired-out, agitated Curé was crying like a baby. God bless him and all kind hearts like his.

De Jençay went to the carriage and lifted Cattie out. As he carried her up the steps and up the stairs, she let her head rest on his shoulder as it had never yet done. He laid her on the drawing-room sofa; but as he withdrew his arms, she clung to him.

"You will not go, Armand—you must not go. I can bear anything but that. Oh! stupid—stupid me!" and then there followed such a tumult of words. "It is not good logic—the Duke told me

it was not. No; I will never, never again! I am not to expect you to be satisfied because I say I love you; but I do! Yes, I was proud; it was pride—pride. Don't go away, don't! I am humble, very humble."

"I will do what you wish, go or stay," said de Jençay, in a broken voice.

"I won't be soothed; he called me a tigress. Be angry, only don't go away."

"I am not angry. I am willing to stay; but if you wish to prove that you love me, you will try to be calm."

"I am calm;" and she sat up and looked for a minute earnestly at him. Then she hid her face in her hands and wept bitterly. What was it she had seen in his countenance? Alas, alas! *only* pain.

"Try and rest," he said. "Will you let me carry you to bed."

"No, not for worlds! Oh, Armand! love me a little."

"Foolish child. I love you more than you deserve."

A pleasant ending, but, as the Duke said, "not logical."

No one with any experience would believe that de Jençay went back from this hour to the hopes, the charm, the confidingness of the first months of his marriage—the happy days at Rome. A long illness is generally followed by a long convalescence. There is an analogy between mental and bodily suffering. We do not recover from the one or the other with a bound.

It is to ease the writer's conscience, to make her certain that she does not lead the youngest of her readers into error, that she adds, that Cattie had a long and an arduous task thoroughly to reconquer de Jençay's heart. The free gift she had thrown away, she had to give years of self-discipline now for its purchase. Many were her hours of despair, her days of hopelessness. The world saw nothing save what indicated peace and harmony. It was not kindness nor respect she missed; but she often caught the doubting glance, the uneasy expectation, detected the incomplete confidence. But Cattie had the virtues of her defects. She had Will, and she learned how to make it a useful servant. She had never forgot that she had been within an ace of losing the game. She never lost the knowledge she

had acquired, that it would have been better never played.

It was quite four years after that troubled return to la Gonesse, that the Duke received a letter from his godson, which ended thus :—

"Cattie and the two boys were waiting for me at the gate. I assure you to see her dancing the baby, and to feel your big godson pulling at my coat to be kissed, was very pleasant. My wife bids me say, you must come soon, for she cannot be quite happy without you; she warns you not to delay, otherwise Yolande will not leave one of the Deodera nurslings you sent us standing. With the most affectionate sentiments.

"Your grateful godson,

"ARMAND DE JENÇAY."

"P.S.—My mother is again at Rome, and we are expecting a whole caravan of Scotch friends."

THE END.

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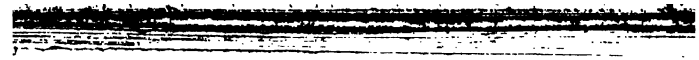
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